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A GUARDIAN ANGEL.



VOL. I.

A

GUARDIAN **A**NGEL.

BY

THE AUTHOR OF

“A TRAP TO CATCH A SUNBEAM,”

ETC.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

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A GUARDIAN ANGEL.

CHAPTER I.



NEW arrival at the White Cottage! What an event in a small village! The White Cottage has long been tenantless. Mrs. Tomkins, the doctor's wife, would have liked it, but she has ten children, and there is not room for them all. Mr. Barnes, the butcher, thought of taking it for a lodging-house; but then suppose he could not let it, and what hope had he of so doing, so far from the station as the

village was, with nothing to recommend it but its pure and beautiful air, which no one knew, and no one praised, but those who had lived in it from their birth, and whose rosy, happy faces were certainly the best testimony to its health and purity ?

Bradleigh lay about five miles from a pleasant country town, in one of England's loveliest counties ; the road from the village to the town seemed like a pleasant walk or drive through gentlemen's parks, for on either side were fine estates, the noble trees of which interlaced their branches across the road with neighbourly affection, affording a pleasant shade in the glowing summer time for the traveller, and countless homes amongst their leaves for myriads of singing birds. Many a Sunday evening, lovers wandered down that road listening to the nightingales among the

trees, and to the sweeter music still, those "old, old words" which are ever new to those who hear them.

It was a gay, bright country town, too, when you reached it, with a wide, clean High-street, a fine old church, a hospital, founded many a year ago by a good bishop, for decayed tradespeople, and almshouses besides, in which six old men and six old women of the place—over sixty years of age—found a happy refuge for their declining years.

There was a good market also, and the girls in the villages round were glad, on a market-day, to have an excuse to visit Barford, the town was so full and gay, and many a harmless joke, and merry laughter, and news and gossip were exchanged that day, which served to form and enliven conversation for those who had been left at home, and whose quiet,

monotonous lives were only varied by such simple events as these.

The village girls in Bradleigh formed no exception to the rule; they, too, liked a trip "to town" on market-days, and it was one of them—pretty Dora Elphick—who brought the news that the White Cottage, at the end of the village, was let at last, for she saw the board "To let" was gone, and a railway van, laden with furniture, was standing before the door.

"Come from a distance, I reckon?" said Mrs. Briggs, the wheelwright's wife, who had dropped in for a chat with Dora's mother.

"Oh, yes!" said Dora, "London, I dare say. I lay they'll bring down some new fashions amongst us. Goodness knows, I'm tired of all our fashions. Why, Miss Bartletts have worn the same sleeves these five years!"

Dora was the only dressmaker the little village boasted of.

“You didn’t see none of ’em, I suppose? However, we shall sure see ’em at church, Sunday.”

“Yes, of course; but by the look of the furniture I’m sure they’s quite gentry—a new-married couple, I should think, it looked so good and new; and you know the house ain’t big enough for a large family.”

“No—sure; else the Tomkinses would have took it,” said Mrs. Briggs.

“Well, I hope it ain’t no poor invalid, or leastways, delicate creatures coming there; for so long as it’s been shut up, it must be damp enough!” answered Mrs. Elphick, who, a martyr to rheumatism herself, had a holy horror of damp and cold. “I did hear as it was took by a relative of Mr.—Mr.—dear

heart alive! what be his name? Here, side the common—that big house?”

“Mr. Stanmore?” prompted Dora.

“Yes, Mr. Stanmore. But there, they only come from Thornly, and wouldn’t want no railway vans to move their things.”

“Oh, no!” said Dora. “I was up at Mr. Stanmore’s yesterday, to try on the house-keeper’s new dress; and she’d have told me if any one they knew had taken the White Cottage, I’m sure.”

“New dress! why, bless me, they must pay her a sight of wages; she seems always having new gowns,” said Mrs. Briggs.

“She does have wages, too, I can tell you; for my aunt lived there many years, and I know she left behind her a handsome lot of savings, though I was none the better for it,” said Mrs. Elphick, in her usual complaining manner.

"Ah ! my dear, money seldom comes to them as needs it in this world," said Mrs. Briggs.

"Well, one comfort is, they won't want it in the next, Mrs. Briggs," replied Dora, cheerfully, as she drew a little table near the lattice window, and sat down to work.

"No, my dear ; very true : you always look on the bright side of everything, that I will say, Dora."

"The bright side is mostly the right side, Mrs. Briggs, I think ; it would be a strange thing if we turned all our pictures with the faces to the wall, and made up our dresses on the wrong side instead of the right ; but it is what most people do, I think. I generally take my troubles and look at them, and turn the best side out, and by hiding the ugly one almost forget it's got one."

"Ah, I wish we could all do that. She

must be a comfort to you, Mrs. Elphick, such a sufferer as you are."

"Yes, she's wonderful cheerful, sure," said her mother.

"She is, indeed; and a great blessing is a cheerful disposition, and them as has it has great call to be thankful. But I must be going; I shall have my man into his tea else, and none ready. Good day, Mrs. Elphick—good day, Dora," and Mrs. Briggs departed, and Mrs. Elphick remained, half-dozing in an easy-chair, and Dora at the window working. There were few pleasanter sights to be seen in the village on a bright summer afternoon than that pretty, good-humoured face looking out amongst the roses that clustered about that lattice window. And many a young fellow coming back from his daily labour thought it was a pleasant

sight, too, and wished the window and the face in it belonged to them,—what a real welcome home would be that glad smile, and what a happy, cleanly home to come to, presided over by such a mistress! But Dora seemed in no hurry to change homes, and only a gay laugh and toss of the head was vouchsafed to the most tender speeches. So she remained at home with her old parents, working for them with a quick and willing hand, and a ready smile for all—ever patient with her ailing, grumbling mother—and forbearing with her father, whose stern disposition made him often scold and rebuke her for the very cheerfulness which made his home so bright, though he knew it not. An elder sister of hers had been married some two or three years, and Dora's life had been happier since, for as long as she could

remember the sins of her quiet, demure sister had been visited on her. Full of fun and frolic, she was glad and ready to venture upon any schemes of mischief; but they had been invariably suggested by her sister, who, though she enjoyed the fun herself, was too great a coward to carry them out. But now the sister was married and gone, and Dora was older and perhaps steadier, or, it may be, with no one to laugh at her mischief, she had less encouragement; but the joyous nature and the innate cheerfulness still remained, nothing could alter that, and her father still scolded, and said she would be a baby all her life, and never fit for a steady man's wife; but had she chosen to try, the light and life of his home would have been gone, and glad enough would he have been once more to hear the merry laugh ring

through the cottage, which now he so often tried to silence.

Dora worked away, singing blithely as she stitched till tea-time; then she got the tea, and called her father from his workshop—Elphick was a carpenter—and came back, still singing, with her apron full of shavings to light the fire in the morning. All tea-time she chatted away of what she had seen at market, and of the new-comers to the White Cottage.

Elphick was naturally a cautious man, and to all her merry talk only vouchsafed a gruff “umph!” He was no gossip; he cared little who came into the village or who went out of it; he had plenty of work, and no time to chat about his neighbours’ affairs; he told no tales and heard none, and so went on the even tenour of his ways—

“neither,” as he said, “making nor meddling.”

When tea was over, Dora cleared it away, and then saying she was going to take home a little work, and would not be long, she threw on her hat and cloak, and was soon walking quickly down the lane at the back of their house. She stopped at a cottage half-way down the lane, and leaving a small parcel at the door, went on a little farther, quickening her pace, and looking anxiously on either side and behind her, till she came to a small copse. She paused there a moment and listened. There was no sound but the twittering of the birds as they settled themselves to roost among the branches of the trees, or the fall of an acorn on the brushwood underneath them. Still she listened, and at length a rustle as of a footstep through the wood, and

then a low whistle made her start forward and step lightly over the stile which divided the copse from the road, for there was a footpath through it which led to the next village.

“ Harry ! Harry ! ” she said, eagerly, and the branches parted, and a young man stood before her.

“ Good girl ! ” he said. “ I knew you’d be here though, you never fail me. I have such news, too—she’s here, actually here.”

“ Really !—where ? ”

“ At a place called the White Cottage ; she came this morning.”

“ Never married, is she ? ” asked Dora, as a bright blush overspread her face, which till that moment had been deadly pale.

“ Good heavens ! no, child ! What should make you think so ? ” he answered, half-angrily.

“ I don’t know ; I fancied——”

“ Oh, no,” he said, interrupting her. “ She has been living with her brother ever since her father’s death. She has kept his house. He has married lately, and I think she is not as happy as she has been. Is it not strange that she should actually come into this neighbourhood ? She little thinks I am so near. Providence has sent her here, Dora ! and I *will* have her or die. Now, what I want you to do for me is to see her somehow ; get the dressmaking there or something, and bring me every bit of news about her that you can think of, and let me know what success you’ve had, this day week, will you, like a dear, good girl ?”

“ I will, indeed, Mr. Aylmer !”

“ Hush, hush ! I must still be Harry more than ever now. God bless and thank

you. I have not a minute more to stay."

He seized her hand, and wrung it warmly, and in a moment was gone.

She stood for a few seconds gazing at the underwood through which he had rushed, and then uttering a low "Heaven help me," moved silently away. Once over the stile, she quickened her pace, and by degrees the colour returned to her face, and the old smile to her ruddy lips, the absence of which had made her look so unlike herself, and by the time she had reached home, she looked as bright and cheerful as ever. Dora had taken her sorrow and looked at it, and turned the brightest side outwards.





CHAPTER II.

THE little news Mrs. Briggs had scraped up about the White Cottage had been duly spread through the village, with additions and alterations as it passed from mouth to mouth, till it was now an ascertained fact to them that a new-married couple had taken it who had been married in London the day before. So the gossips who expected on Sunday to see a bride in all her wedding finery, and a bridegroom all tenderness and devotion, were greatly disappointed to see only two quietly

dressed ladies enter the church and take their seats in the pew ordinarily occupied by the inmates of the White Cottage, turning out as they did so some children who had always sat there since the cottage had been "to let;" for it chanced to be in a corner behind a pillar where the clergyman could not see them, and consequently could not reprimand them for playing. The entrance of the ladies caused a great buzzing through the church, and scarcely ceased before the service began. Beauty charms all, and none perhaps are more open to its influence than children and the so-called "lower orders;" they cannot fully appreciate art and talents, but the love of what is lovely is natural, and therefore, I presume, so valued by those who understand nothing of art.

And therefore the great beauty of one of

the ladies made its due impression on the congregation assembled in that little village church, and for the rest of that day she formed the subject of conversation in the village homes. Was she the bride? If so, who was the lady with her, and where was the devoted bridegroom? In the afternoon the supposed devoted bridegroom allowed the anxious villagers a sight of him, but the little beauty was not with him, only the quiet gentle-looking girl who had been her companion in the morning. There! perhaps *she* was the bride, and the beauty only a friend staying with them. And Dora Elphick—I fear her devotions were not as uninterrupted as usual—she could not refrain from curious, anxious glances towards the pew which contained the inmates of the White Cottage, nor could she repress those painful wander-

ings of thought with which we are all at times compelled to struggle. How was she to accomplish the task allotted to her? How was she to become acquainted with *her*, and bring Harry news in a week? This thought occupied her day and night, till even her father remarked on her quiet, thoughtful manner, and said "surely she was growing steady at last."

Quite unconscious of the sensation they had created were the new comers. They were delighted with the pretty village, with its old church, and with their own picturesque cottage; and occupied with their own concerns, little thought how their arrival formed a subject of conversation in almost every home that quiet Sabbath evening.

"Sing to us, Geraldine," said Herbert Lascelles, flinging himself into a chair, after

having enjoyed a quiet cigar in the garden, "some of that lovely music from the 'Elijah.' "

"It will disturb Edith's perusal of her sermon," answered his wife with a slight laugh.

"Not at all, dear Geraldine," said the young lady in question, instantly closing her book; "I shall equally like to hear sacred words set to sacred music. You know how much I like singing, yours especially."

"Do you really? It is not always evident, but you have that happy knack of concealing your feelings which I do not possess," and with another laugh the beauty who had caused such a sensation in the village church that morning went to the piano, and soon the rich tones of her fine voice were filling the little cottage. The other young lady had made no reply to the last speech, but tears

had filled her eyes, and she had walked to the open window to conceal them perhaps, and remained there, gazing out on the still evening, and watching the stars as one by one they took their appointed stations in the clear sky, while the words which her sister-in-law was singing sank into her heart, and gave her the comfort she seemed so much to need,—“Oh! rest in the Lord, wait patiently for Him.”

“There! that will do for to-night, I cannot sing another note; we had better have prayers and let the maids go to bed.”

“It is very early, I think,” said Edith, turning from the window; “not much more than nine.”

“All the better; ‘early to bed and early to rise’ is a good old saying—the servants cannot get up and sit up.”

Edith made no other answer. Herbert

asked for the book, which his wife handed him, and rang the bell for the servants. The devotions concluded, the ladies went at once to their rooms, leaving Herbert reading in the armchair, asserting that it was far too hot for bed for the next three hours.

What a change did the closing of that bedroom door make in the haughty bearing of the little beauty ! She threw herself into a chair, and pressing her small white hands tightly on her temples, large tears rolled down her flushed cheeks ; the cause of which, had she spoken aloud, would have thus revealed itself:—

“ How long is this to last—this constant fighting with my better nature ? I would be kind and gentle if she would let me. How little she thinks she is indebted to me for her home here !—but I would not stoop to

win her love by telling her so. Her quiet, insidious manner is what enrages me. If she would only openly defy me, say she had been mistress here before me and still meant to be, I should know better how to deal with her; but that provoking meekness, and apparent resigning all to me, when in her heart she disapproves of all I do, is so trying! And dear Herbert, I know it worries him; and I try so hard not to let him see it, that at times I feel the struggle too much and must give it up. But then he would be angry, and turn her adrift on the world, poor girl! for from the first he has said his wife should be mistress in his house. Gladly, but for this, would I give it all up, and let her take the rule she seems so much to covet."

These unpleasant thoughts, which, as I have said, would in some way have thus ex-

pressed themselves in words, were disturbed by hearing her husband ascending the stairs. She rose hastily, and pouring some rose-water into her hands, tried to efface the traces of her tears.

"Oh! Geraldine, love," he said, "I think you must see Susan; she has just been to me in the drawing-room to say that Edith has given her warning. You know that is outrageous interference with you, and not to be tolerated."

"Susan must be mistaken, Herbert dearest; I am sure Edith would not think of such a thing."

"Well, I will send her to you, and you will hear her own story—but, my darling, what is the matter? You have been crying!" he said, tenderly drawing her to him, and with gentle force turning her averted face to him.

"You would not think your sensible little wife foolish enough to cry at a book, would you?" she said, smiling, and pointing to an open book which lay on the table.

"'Thankfulness,'" he said, taking it up and reading the title; "I never read it, so I can't say whether it deserves your tears, but if you never cry at anything but imaginary sorrow in books, my darling, I shall be satisfied that my dear little wife is not very unhappy. But pray settle this affair about Susan, love, at once; for I told you from the first you must never for one moment give up your authority in anything, or the present establishment cannot go on. If Edith gives you the slightest trouble, she must really find herself another home."

"Nonsense, Herbert darling; why think of

such a thing?—you see no evidence that she does so.”

“ Well, I don’t understand this story of Susan’s.”

“ Oh, some misunderstanding, I am sure ; send her to me at once, and I will settle it.”

“ I will.”

And a few moments after Herbert had left the room, Susan tapped at her mistress’s door. Susan was a very flaunty, fly-away young woman ; no servant of the old school, in large white apron and neat cap tied under her chin—serving the purpose for which a cap was originally intended, that of covering the head and preserving the hair from dust. No ! no such disfiguring thing was allowed to cover the *auburn* hair of Susan Watts ; a little Jenny Lind, of the smallest possible size, covered with rose-coloured ribbons—sweet

contrast to her hair!—hung at the back of her head; the said hair dressed in rolls, which fell down on her neck and dirtied her collars and greased her gowns; but what did that signify?—it was the fashion, and the washing was put out. A gown covered with flounces and a tiny black silk apron completed her costume; but on this particular occasion a hoop of gigantic dimensions, under which her gown lapped when she moved, making the steel ring at the bottom very evident, was added to finish, as she considered, her fashionable toilette.

“Oh, come in, Susan. What is this I hear about Miss Lascelles giving you warning?”

“She has, ma’am; and really I thought it was very strange, and so I went to Mr. Lascelles to inquire how I was to take it, seeing as I don’t hold to two mistresses in a

house, and couldn't stay in no place if there was to be such."

"Certainly not, Susan; I am your mistress, and no other person is to be considered so; but you must have misunderstood Miss Lascelles; I am sure she never would have taken the liberty to discharge my servants. Explain to me what passed between you."

"Well, ma'am, the minute prayers was over, she rung her bell, and when I answered it said, 'Susan, you know hoops is not allowed in this house, and so for such open disobedience as yours you must expect to leave this day month.'"

"And what did you say, Susan?"

"'That's as Mr. and Mrs. Lascelles pleases, Miss,' said I, and out I walked and down stairs to Mr. Lascelles at once."

Susan was much too fashionable a servant

to use the good old terms "Master and Mistress."

"Well, understand me, Susan: as long as I find you cleanly, honest, and a good servant, you will remain in my house, and your style of dress will be regulated by me, and not by Miss Lascelles." And as she spoke this haughtily, a flush of anger and excitement burnt upon her cheek.

"Good night, Susan; you had better go to bed now."

"Thank you, ma'am; good night, ma'am;" and Susan swept triumphantly out of the room.

When Herbert came up to bed, an hour or so later, his wife was asleep, but on her long lashes large tears were hanging.

Herbert mentally resolved that she should not be allowed to read "Thankfulness" any

more ; he was sure agitating books were not good for her ; besides, he could not bear anything or anybody to vex or make her cry.

The next morning, at breakfast, Geraldine seemed unusually bright. She had coaxed her husband not to hide her book, assuring him that a good "cry" now and then did her good, and she felt much happier afterwards. Of this she convinced him by being merrier than usual at breakfast. As soon as it was over and Herbert had left the room, Geraldine at once commenced addressing Edith on the subject which had been rankling in her mind ever since her interview with Susan the previous night.

"Will you oblige me, Edith, by stating your reasons for discharging one of my servants?"

“When you tell me which servant, and when and where I discharged her, Geraldine, I may be able to answer you,” answered Miss Lascelles, quietly.

“Last night, as I understand, you discharged Susan ; but it is really of no consequence, scarcely worth speaking about, for I soon convinced the girl that she was in error in attending to any orders but mine, and so it is all settled.”

A tremulous movement of the under lip, and slight clenching of the delicate white hand resting on the table, were the only outward signs of the effect these words produced on their hearer, and then she answered, in her usual quiet tones, as Geraldine, taking up the keys, prepared to leave the room—

“Hear me a moment, Geraldine. When Susan came to my room last night with my hot

water, I said, knowing that you and Herbert had expressed yourselves as being very particular about the neat dressing of your household, that I thought for her own sake, if she wished to retain her place, she had better leave off that large hoop, which I knew you and her master objected to. I am very sorry I interfered, if it was wrong, but I did it to save you annoyance. Susan is always saucy when spoken to, and I thought she would annoy you by some impertinent reply."

"Oh, my dear girl, we know well you never liked Susan, and are always glad to find fault with her. I think her an excellent servant, so it is scarcely worth while to say more about it; only for the future please say nothing to the servants which they can possibly mistake for an order." And Geraldine left the room.



CHAPTER III.



LF by this time I have created some interest for the characters in my tale, the reader may like to know something of them before their arrival at the White Cottage.

About two years previous Herbert Lascelles had made acquaintance with Geraldine Mowbray at a pic-nic. Her extreme beauty and fascination of course furnished her with admirers; and for some time Herbert only worshipped her as some bright particular star far beyond his reach. She had a somewhat unusual

combination, wealth as well as beauty. She was the daughter of a rich City merchant, and at his death Geraldine would not only inherit a good property, but he also intended making her a handsome allowance on her marriage. Many of her admirers, therefore, were of far higher rank than herself; for they felt her beauty, and her father's banking account might well render them unmindful of her pedigree; but though her bright smiles were equally divided amongst them all, her heart remained untouched. One by one her suitors were dismissed, and her father would ask her if she meant always to stay with "her poor old dad." But a pic-nic party to Hampton Court, got up by an Honourable Mrs. Fremantle, a widow, with a son whom she would have been glad to see well married, decided Geraldine's fate. Long before he dared to address one word of

love to her, Geraldine's heart was given to Herbert Lascelles, and the honourable widow's son received his *cong  * from the beautiful heiress, to whom his mother had persuaded him to propose. It cost him a few more cigars, and drove him to take a month's grouse-shooting with a friend, before he could forget the lovely Geraldine or "the doosed nuithance of being refused," and the "lovely Geraldine" danced, laughed, and flirted through another season; meeting Herbert Lascelles everywhere—crying herself to sleep many and many a night through these dreary weeks, to think that the man for whom she would have given her life was the only one who did not seem to care for her. Do not be shocked, young ladies, at her thus giving her love unasked. Geraldine was only "loving what was lovely," for besides his external appearance, which was unusually good,

Herbert Lascelles was thoroughly loveable—an intelligent, agreeable companion, with a charming combination of gentleness, courage, and strength. He never talked to girls as though they lived in ball-rooms and cared for nothing but empty flattery; he spoke to them as women who had hearts and minds, and gave them credit for good sense even if they did not deserve it. No one could talk long to him without being better satisfied with himself, and yet he was bright and gay, heartily enjoying fun, and able to turn a graceful compliment where it was deserved. Geraldine could not, therefore, be blamed for choosing to bestow on him the treasure of her first-true love; only would she have deserved censure, had she let him know it. He knew not how honoured he was, and only followed her from place to place to gladden his eyes

with what was so dear to him, and, as he considered, so far beyond his reach.

Besides his personal attractions, Geraldine had discovered that he was a devoted brother to his young sister, who with himself had been left an orphan some few years; they had lived together ever since, he endeavouring to increase the small property left him by his father by studying hard at painting, of which he was passionately fond, and becoming at last so successful an artist that he was sure of a sale of two or more pictures at each exhibition. Besides his feeling that Geraldine, from her wealth, was placed above him, he also considered his sister; where was she to find a home if he married? He had a strong objection to relations residing together after marriage; he fancied neither his sister nor his wife would be happy, and so he tried earnestly to overcome

the passion he felt, and content himself with transferring to his canvas Geraldine's face and form in every imaginable costume, and hoping that by a happy marriage his sister would one day remove the most serious impediment to his happiness. This desirable event seemed at length on the point of fulfilment, for Edith received a proposal from a young clergyman, the possessor of a good family living; but alas! to his astonishment and bitter disappointment, Edith refused this eligible offer. For the first time since his dying mother confided her to his care Herbert spoke angrily to his sister.

"I know the romantic folly which makes you refuse to make this estimable man happy and find yourself a happy home. You are still clinging to the hope that that scoundrel Harry Aylmer will right himself; but that

is utter madness, Edith, and the sooner you dismiss such absurd fancies the better. Do you think his father would have turned him out of his house had he not been certain of his guilt? and had he been innocent, think you he would not have been able to prove it? Pray banish this folly like a sensible girl, as you are. Edith, Edith, don't be so silly!" he said, stopping suddenly, as a low wail broke on his ear, and looking up he saw Edith had dropped her head down on the cushion of the sofa, and her whole frame was convulsed with agonized weeping.

Herbert loved his sister dearly, and little thought what a fearful emotion his words would create when he uttered them so angrily. He sat down beside her, and strove to console her. He begged her to forgive his hasty allusion to a painful subject which he

had hoped time had almost obliterated from her mind, and assured her that he himself was overpowered by a grief which made him irritable and cross. In a moment the poor girl raised her face, streaming with tears, from the cushion, and through her sobs said—

“Darling, may your sorrow never be like mine! There is no grief in this world, with all its sorrow, so great as to believe in the wrong-doing of those we love. More gladly would I have seen *my* Harry, still mine, Herbert, through all, in his death-sleep, than have parted from him as I did. But could I forget him?—could I cease to pray for and to love one who has no one else to love him? Am I so good, and pure, and perfect that I can dare scorn one who has sinned, through what strong temptation we

know not. And still more as, spite of all—weak, silly, and romantic as you may call it—I still *do* hope he may yet prove his innocence. Oh, Herbert! what would be my agony if then I had deserted him and become the wife of another! Let me comfort you in your sorrow if I can, but in mercy leave me alone with mine. I will not plague you with it, dearest brother, indeed; only let us never speak of it again.” And throwing her arm round his neck, she kissed him fondly. The tears were in his own eyes—his own deep love taught him sympathy with hers, and he could not find it in his heart to say that she helped to stand in the way of his happiness, looking in that sad, desolate face; so he only tenderly returned her kiss, and murmured, “Poor girl! God bless and comfort you!” and made a resolve

that nothing should induce him again to intrude on the sanctity of her sorrow, or cause her to leave his home for any other. And so he would have gone on, leaving poor Geraldine to wear the willow for his sake, but for a singular circumstance.

He and his sister had been invited to a syllabub party on the lawn, at a friend's at Richmond, to celebrate the birthday of one of her little girls. The majority of the company consisted of children, but several young people were invited to help to entertain the young ones, and were promised a dance in the evening if they exerted themselves well. Herbert being excessively fond of children, and one who did his best for their amusement, had suggested a game of Hare and Hounds, consenting himself to be the hare, and had hidden himself behind a summer-

house in the shrubbery, where he was lying effectually concealed among the thick shrubs. As he had not entered the summer-house, he did not know any one was there until he heard voices, and thinking it was the little hounds in pursuit, he remained quite motionless till a name struck his ear which made his heart beat, and his face, though he lay there alone and unseen, flush crimson.

"Geraldine Mowbray is coming by-and-bye, is she not?" said a light, girlish voice.

"Yes, I believe so," was the reply. "Do you like her?"

"Oh, so much! She is my cousin, you know—and isn't she lovely?"

"Yes, very. I wonder she has never been married."

"It's her own fault; she has had lots of

offers. But I know why. I often laugh at her about it, and it is the only time she gets angry—poor Gerry.”

“ Oh ! what is it ? tell me,” eagerly asked the other girl.

“ Well, you must promise me to take no notice to her ; she would never forgive me ; and after all it’s only supposition. But you watch her to-day, and you’ll see how she changes colour when she sees him, and agree with me that she loves Herbert Lascelles.”

“ Herbert Lascelles ! You never mean it ? ”

“ I won’t breathe a syllable to any one ; but it will be fun to watch. Let us go back again on the lawn at once, and see if she is come.”

And the two girls left the summer-house and strolled on to the lawn, little thinking

that their words had been heard, or what effect they had produced.

And he, Herbert Lascelles,—was it any wonder he had forgotten the game—where he was—all save the intoxicating idea which had been suggested to him by the idle talk of two merry girls? Could it possibly be true? Was such happiness within his grasp? A loud shout from many merry little voices disturbed his thoughts, and before he could recall his senses, he was seized by little eager hands, and dragged towards the lawn, there to be triumphantly slaughtered by the eager huntsman and his greedy hounds. And as they dragged and pushed him along—he feeling all the time in a dream—he suddenly found himself face to face with Geraldine Mowbray. She had that moment arrived, and stepped through the window on to the lawn as

the children brought him there in triumph. Hastily shaking off his captors, he raised his hat to Miss Mowbray, who, as she returned the bow, blushed crimson, and stammered forth some inquiry as to where the lady of the house was. He had not time to reply, when the lady herself came forward, and shaking hands cordially with her, assured her how kind it was of her to come, &c. &c., and led her off to some part of the garden where she said she would find some friends.

But Herbert had seen enough. Why should she blush at his unexpected appearance? If she had no feeling for him beyond that of a common stranger, would she have changed colour in that way? Did it not prove that those words spoken so lightly were really true? And if so, must he not speak to her and tell how fondly and truly her love was

returned? As these thoughts filled his heart, making him forgetful of where he was—of all but the bright, bright hope that Geraldine might be his,—the children with whom he had been so kindly playing, finding him unwilling to play with them more, had all dispersed, and he was standing alone on the lawn, when a gentle touch on his shoulder, and a low, sweet voice, asking him what he was thinking of so seriously, roused him from the fair dream he was so happily indulging in. It was his sister Edith. With difficulty he checked a sharp reply to her inquiries, for the sight of her had again brought to his mind the recollection that she stood between him and happiness. Making some vague reply to her inquiries, he moved away in another direction, almost determining to make a headache an excuse for leaving the party

and returning home, so much did he long in silence and solitude to quiet the tumult of his mind and come to some settled determination. He had made up his mind to seek the lady of the house and state this to her, promising to return for his sister in the evening, if he was better, or else send the carriage for her, when, turning a corner of the shrubbery down which he was walking, there on a rustic seat, supporting her head on her hand, sat Geraldine Mowbray alone. The temptation was too great. He was unwilling to turn back, or pass her with a bow only; she was so pale, too; perhaps she was ill: so, in tones which trembled in spite of his strongest efforts, he pronounced her name. She raised her head, and again the blush mantled over her face as she saw who addressed her.

"Are you ill?" he asked.

"I have a wretched headache, thank you," she said, trying to rise.

"Do not move, pray. Is there anything I can get you or do for you—an ice, a little soda water?" asked Herbert, eagerly.

"No, nothing, thank you. I fear I must go home again if it does not get better."

Poor Geraldine! Why did that wretched headache come that day to make her so nervous that tears filled her eyes in spite of herself, and an aching in her throat almost impeded her utterance?

He saw the tears, and his own heart beat faster and faster. They were both silent—that ominous silence which so often exists between undeclared lovers, when one longs to speak and the other to be spoken to, and yet both dread the next word, which may

break the spell and wake them from their dream.

He spoke first, but with no gush of eloquence did the declaration of his long-repressed passion burst forth. In hesitating, interrupted sentences he said—

“We have known each other some long time now, Miss Mowbray,—long enough to call ourselves friends, I think; but I have long had the temerity to covet—a dearer—title. I would have told you so before, but my sister, she has no other home, and I have feared that even if you could—could care for me, you would not like to share my home with her. Geraldine,” he continued, with more boldness, as Geraldine’s tears fell fast now, and the little delicately gloved hand which he had taken was not withdrawn, “dare I hope that you will, should my home ever be mine

alone, make it by your presence a heaven upon earth to me?"

Geraldine was too sensible and withal too heartily in love to pretend indifference or give a vague reply to a question she now knew was of such vital importance to the happiness of him who asked it; and so, very simply and very earnestly, though in a low tone, she answered—

"Any home with you would be a happy one to me."

Herbert could scarcely believe his senses as these words, so simple and yet so unaffectedly true, broke on his ear. Never before to him had there been such music in a sound. He had no words to thank her, no way to tell her what he felt, but in the long and rapturous embrace with which he held her to his heart.

Geraldine was the idol of her father; her wish was law, and so he made no objection to her marriage. She made it an especial favour to her that Herbert should never think of removing his sister until she chose a home for herself.

"We will be quite happy together indeed, dear, and she shall still be mistress, if you like."

"No, my darling," he had answered, "no one shall be mistress in my house but my wife. If you will take the rule and keep it, and Edith will contentedly resign it to you, she may stay with us as long as she likes; but once let me see her annoy you, or attempt to take your place, and I will no longer have her an inmate in our house."

Geraldine, who had been a completely spoilt child at home, doing nothing but amuse her-

self, and waited on hand and foot, knew nothing of housekeeping, and would gladly have left it all to Edith but for this strict injunction of her husband, added to the suggestions of some female friends, who assured her that she must not allow Edith to think her ignorant of anything; but take the command at once and keep it, not listening to her suggestions, nor following any advice from her sister-in-law, or she would soon find that she was only a cipher in her own house. From the moment, therefore, of her arrival at her new home she had assumed the manner of command, so unnatural to her really, and, as I have shown, rendered herself miserably unhappy thereby.





CHAPTER IV.

THE morning on which Geraldine had spoken to Edith respecting Susan's dismissal, Dora Elphick arrayed herself in her best, determined to call at the White Cottage and see Edith if possible. Accordingly, when Susan answered her modest knock at the door, she inquired if she could speak with Miss Lascelles.

"I will see; step in, if you please," said Susan, looking very curiously at the pretty, brightly dressed little country maiden, wondering what she could want with Miss Lascelles.

Geraldine had finished her domestic duties of ordering dinner, &c., and taken her place in the drawing-room with some work, when Susan entered to say that a young woman wanted Miss Lascelles.

"Miss Lascelles?" said Geraldine, interrogatively.

"Yes, mum, she said Miss Lascelles."

"Well, show her into the little room, and tell Miss Lascelles; she is in the garden, I think." And so in a few moments Dora stood face to face with the idol of Harry Aylmer's heart. She trembled so, she could not speak or tell her errand.

Miss Lascelles, astonished at her silence, said quietly, "I understood you asked for me: what can I do for you?"

With a great effort Dora answered, "I am a dressmaker in this parish, miss, and

have taken the liberty to call and ask you if you would kindly employ me."

"I shall be very glad to do so if I require any work done, and will mention it to my sister; *she* is the mistress here, you know."

"Yes, miss; perhaps you would ask her too, if she would employ me," and Dora looked up for the first time in the young lady's face searchingly, for the tone in which she had uttered the last part of the sentence struck on her ear so sadly.

"She is not happy," thought Dora, "that's certain."

"I will do my best for you," said Edith; "will you give me your name and address?"

"I live at the end of the village, miss, just beyond the church—opposite Darrell's forge; my name is Dora Elphick."

The slightest possible start and change of

colour were perceptible in Edith's face, as Dora slowly pronounced the name, but she only quietly said, "I will remember." Dora had no farther excuse to stay, but she would have given a great deal for something to take to Harry that Edith had touched or worn. Her hesitation in going, and the fact that she was gazing apparently with great earnestness at a bunch of flowers she held in her hand, made Edith fancy she coveted one, and with her gentle kindness, or from some tender memory connected with the name of "Elphick," she said, with a sweet smile, handing one of the roses to Dora—

"You seem to look with longing eyes at my flowers: will you have this one?"

"Oh! thank you, miss, very much," said Dora, more delighted than she dared show at this unexpected fulfilment of her wish,

and with a curtsey full of natural grace she departed.

She flew to her own room as soon as she reached home, and deposited the treasured rose in water, on her little dressing-table; and as she did so, she caught a glimpse of herself in the looking-glass, and a thought struck her—a very pardonable one—that the face she saw reflected there was a far prettier one than that which held such a place in Harry's memory; and then the recollection came back to her of how many times he had said it was a pretty face years ago, and kissed those bright red lips, saying he was only tasting the cherries which were so temptingly in his reach, and how in those happy days of that "long ago" he had played with her long glossy hair, and twined bryony amongst it, and told her

she was lovelier so than the ladies in their grand dresses. True, they were but children then, but yet she could remember since then his coming to see her after a year or two's absence, and telling her she was prettier than ever, and he should like to take her to London, to shame some of the girls there, who thought themselves so beautiful. Idle talk, but still so sweet to listen to, when uttered by those whose praise and admiration we covet. And as she thus recalled the past she went to a box which contained some of her girlish treasures, and took from it a bundle of letters worn with constant reading, but though she almost knew them by heart, it seemed pleasant to read them again. Seated on the edge of her bed, her hat thrown off, and her long hair pushed back from her face,

she read them all. The first few were written in an untidy schoolboy hand, with very little information in them, principally consisting of thanks for "the awfully jolly plum-cake dear nurse had sent, and he should like another soon; that he liked being at school very much, but it was not so jolly as dear old Bradleigh." The dates of the few first were tolerably near together, but the rest were at much longer intervals. All these she read somewhat hurriedly, but on the last she dwelt long, reading it again and again; it was as follows:—

"MY GOOD, DEAR LITTLE DORA,

• "I am in sad trouble, and I write a line to ask if my kind nurse will take me in at her cottage for a night or two. I shall not wait for an answer, for I am sure she

will have me. You won't know me when I come, hardly—at least I hope not, for I shall not be dressed like a gentleman. I do not want any one in Bradleigh to know me, except yourselves. I will tell you the reason of all this when we meet.

“Your affectionate foster-brother,

“H. A.”

“P. S. You may imagine how wretched I am when I tell you I am parted for ever from E——, about whom I wrote you in my last.”

What distress had that letter occasioned Dora when it arrived ; and how she and her mother had listened at every footstep and started at every sound till he came—came dressed in a velveteen shooting-coat and gaiters, his whiskers all cut off, and his

hands and face dyed a dark gipsy-brown ; so that, but for this preparatory letter, they would not have known him. And there, seated in their little cottage, he told them how he was accused and suspected of a sin he had not committed, and how he had been in consequence turned out of his father's house, and out of the banking-house in which he was engaged, to earn his living in what way he could. His father had placed a small sum at his banker's for his use, to be drawn quarterly, that he might not starve ; but desired that he might never see him more, and advised him to leave England.

"That," he said, "I will not do whilst Edith Lascelles is alive and unmarried. I am perfectly innocent of the charge brought against me, but I cannot prove it yet—one day I may be able. I am extremely fond of

the country, especially this part of it, and have determined, as I will not live in idleness, to apply for a situation as gamekeeper. I have seen an advertisement in the paper where one is required on an estate a mile or two from here. You know it, I dare say—"The Cedars" it is called—Sir James Huntley's. Now, I want you, Elphick, to call me your nephew, and go with me to get the situation. No advice now; I have set my heart on it; and if you will not help me, I must try some other way."

Elphick, though, as I have said, a strange, stern, quiet man, had a strong feeling of love for the once delicate baby his wife had nursed and brought up. He was as dear, if not dearer than his children. Having no boy, he had taken the little fellow into his heart, watched his growth and his in-

creasing strength day by day, and had grown more silent and more stern since the sad day when the boy was sent for home. And so, though he disapproved of this wild freak, as he called it, he could not find it in his heart to refuse him, more especially as it would bring him near him, with more frequent opportunities of seeing him.

He paused for a moment, though, before he answered him, and said, "Do you know anything of your duties, eh?"

"Why, of course I do; I was always with old Barnsley when we lived at Sutton, and could handle a gun, as you know well, when I was scarcely higher than the table. I know all about it, never fear. The few years of London life have not spoilt me, I assure you. I'm a countryman at heart, Elphick, and there is no country sport or occupation I'm

not up in. Call me Harry Elphick, and go with me to Sir James to-morrow."

And so he did, and at once obtained the situation. When he could get away of an evening, he would come into the little wood for a short interview with Dora—who was, as she had always been, his confidant—as he feared to come into the village too often, for he fancied one or two there had eyed him suspiciously, and of course he was anxious not to be discovered. He had heard of the arrival of the Lascelles at the White Cottage from a friend of his in London, the only person whom he had entrusted with the secret of his whereabouts—one who had been his staunch supporter through all, and who had promised him to acquaint him with any news of importance which could in any way affect his happiness.

All this passed again before Dora's mind as she sat holding the letters, and she wondered what it could be that Harry had done which caused such severity on his father's part. She had often heard her mother say he was such a strict man, so honest, straightforward, and truthful himself, that he could not tolerate the reverse in any one else, and also that Harry had never been his favourite. He had only two children, boys ; but he had ever considered that Frederick, the eldest, was by far the best, and more worthy of his love and confidence ; and so she could understand that he was more willing to believe wrong of the younger than the elder, but still it must have been a grave offence indeed to merit such a punishment. He had been about three months in his new situation, and declared that he liked it much better than

any employment in the world. His master, pleased with his superior manners, treated him excessively well; and, but for his separation from Edith Lascelles, he would have been comparatively happy.

As Dora sat there, recalling the past and thinking of the present, there came into her mind a thought which many times lately had entered it—a foolish thought, but it called up a bright blush to her cheek and a glad smile to her lip. It was a vision of a happy home, of which she was to be mistress, where there would be one, forsaken of all besides, driven from his higher position to take equal rank with her; whose every whim should be her law; whose humble, devoted, and adoring slave she would be; for whose sake she would learn and read, and by every means in her power strive to make herself a worthier com-

panion to him, and that she would ask nothing in return but the honour of bearing his name and cheering his solitude. But it was but a passing thought, driven away quickly as the words came back to her—"I will have Edith or die."

"Dora ! Dora ! whatever are you doing so long upstairs?—you're wanted."

Springing up from her seat, and hastily pushing the letters back into her box, Dora hurried downstairs in obedience to her mother's summons, expecting to find some one waiting to give an order about a dress ; and a look of the greatest vexation and annoyance passed over her face when she saw who it was wanted her. Standing by the door, with his cap in his hand, stood a sturdy-looking fellow about two or three and thirty, who, at Dora's approach, coloured up to the roots of his hair

as he stammered out, "Good morning, miss."

"Sackett's just looked in to see if you want anything in the town, my dear," said her mother; "very civil and thoughtful on him, sure."

"Nothing, Mr. Sackett, thank you," said Dora, coldly. "Where are you going, mother?" she continued quickly, seeing her mother preparing to rise from her chair. "What do you want?—let me get it for you."

"No, my deary, thank you; I only want to speak to father in the shop a minute."

"Let me help you, then."

"No, no," answered her mother, pettishly, "let me help myself when I can; I ain't always able, but I do like to when I can."

There was nothing more to be said, and Mrs. Elphick went out of the room, leaving Sackett standing still by the door with his cap in his hand, and Dora with a flushed and unusually angry expression on her face by her work-table, turning over the work with a sort of irritable nervous jerk, as though she was hunting for something.

"I thought," at length said Sackett, edging slowly nearer and nearer the table as he spoke, "that maybe you might want summut matched in the town in the ribbon way or woman's gear o' some kind."

"Nothing, thank you, Mr. Sackett," answered Dora, coldly. "I was in the town myself yesterday."

His gradual approach to the table had brought him close beside her now, and bending his head down till it was on so close a level

with Dora's face that she could feel his breath upon her cheek, he said—

“Dora Elphick, I have loved you since you were a bit o’ a child scarcely higher than the table. I have worked hard early and late to have a home to give you. I’ve a good one now, and I’ve come to tell you so. You should want for nothing; your hands need never to handle rougher work than such as this,” he said, pointing to some muslin on the table, “and then only to pleasure yourself; you should go to church in your silk gown with the best of them, and never know want or care. Come to the home that’s been waiting so long for you, Dora! The true love of an honest man’s not to be scorned, and merits more than the haughty looks and cold words you will only give him. Say you will, Dora! Only one word, and I’ll go to

the parson to-night, and have the banns up !”

The flush had gradually deepened on Dora’s face, and her breathing was short and hurried as she listened to these words. As he ceased speaking she turned round to him, and drawing herself some paces back from him, said haughtily—

“Mr. Sackett, I should have thought my manner to you would have prevented your forcing me to say what can only be unpleasant for me to speak and you to hear; but perhaps it will be better for us both to end this at once—at once and for ever. Then, understand—I cannot be your wife !”

“You mean it?—you mean what you say?” he asked, eagerly.

“Of course I do,” answered Dora.

“Then there’s some one else you do love.

Now, mark me,—he shall *never* have you !
I'm a man of strong will ; nothing has ever
beat me yet, and nothing ever shall. No man
on earth shall call you wife while I live !”

Dora laughed a little scornful laugh, and
tossed her head with a pretty little air of
defiance, which made the excited man still
more angry.

“Ah ! ah !” he said, “my lady, you won't
always laugh ; do it while you can. Go now
and tell all the village you've made a fool
of Dick Sackett ! Go and laugh loud and
long at him out there on the green amongst
them all ! Point him out as he goes along,
and say, ‘There's the fool that worked day and
night for me, to give me a happy home, and I
laughed in his face, and wouldn't have him
after all. There goes the idiot that thought
the day was brighter when he saw me !—that

would have cut off his right hand to save me from a moment's pain!—ay, give his *life* for me.' Go and laugh loud and long; it's a subject for a laugh; it makes me laugh, I declare, to think of it!—to think—ah! ah!—to think what fools men can be; ah! ah!" and sinking back into a chair, he dropped his head into his hands, and his whole frame shook—not with laughing, Dora knew. Beyond all in the village, even in childhood, she had disliked this man, and always feared, as she grew older, that he intended to ask her to be his wife, and by increased coldness and reserve hoped to avoid the necessity of refusing him; but she never for a moment believed that this rough, passionate man really loved her, or that her refusal would cause him any pain beyond the momentary wounding of his self-love, or far more quietly would she have answered

him. Greatly was she pained, therefore, to see his intense emotion ; and dreading, too, the entrance of her mother or any one, she went to him, and laying her hand quietly on his shoulder, said kindly—

“ I am sorry indeed to pain you, very sorry ; and I have no thought of laughing at you, indeed ; I only laughed at your threat. Go home now, forget all this, and let us remain friends.”

He started at her touch, but moved not nor spoke till she ceased speaking, and then rising and dashing the back of his hand across his eyes, snatched up his cap from the ground, and rushed out of the cottage. With great, rapid strides he went down the garden, kicking away a little kitten which was lying by the path, and at the same desperate pace through the village to his own home, about a quarter

of a mile beyond, which was a very pretty cottage beside a water-mill, and which for the last few years it had been his pride to keep in order and adorn with flowers to make a fitting home for Dora. Its picturesque situation, its exquisite cleanliness, and the profusion of flowers which filled the garden and clambered over the rustic porch he had made with his own hands, rendered it a pleasant dwelling-place for any one certainly; but Dora would have preferred the closest room in a small London lodging-house to this pretty home, if she must share it with Richard Sackett.

He entered the cottage, opened the door of the best parlour, and stood gazing at it—that room where he had so often pictured to himself he should see Dora seated on the quiet Sunday, when they should only use that

best room, with the fire-light shining on her bright face in winter, or the cool, scented breeze fanning her cheeks and lifting her long, lovely hair in the sweet summer-time.

That dream was all over, and he hated the room as much as he had once loved it. He turned away, closed and locked the door, and went on to the kitchen, where his surly old housekeeper was preparing the dinner. She asked him some question, which he angrily answered, feeling as though he should much like to put her in the mill-stream, and follow himself, as he remembered how often he had smiled at the thought of the contrast between his present housekeeper and the one he hoped to have. Now he knew this pleasant hope was ended, and the cross old woman would still reign over his household, or he be bothered to seek another. That he would not do, for she

at least was honest, and her crossness was no matter to him, he could match her at that ; and nothing now could make him happy, so what did it signify ? And with this pleasant reflection he sat down to his dinner, which after all was taken away almost untasted.





CHAPTER V.



THE arrival at the White Cottage of some new people gave the gentry of the village and neighbourhood something to do in calling upon them, and so each day Geraldine made some fresh acquaintance for the first few weeks of her residence in Bradleigh, and had her time occupied in returning the calls. To her, who had lived always in London, this country society was all strange and new, and, for the time, amusing. The small amount of conversation, the little they seemed to know or

be interested in, beyond their own immediate concerns and those of their neighbours, seemed so odd to her; they appeared to imagine the whole world consisted of Bradleigh and six miles round it either way. Sir James and Lady Huntley were the only persons she had yet seen of congenial mind with herself, and with them she was delighted. They could talk on subjects of general interest—on art and science; they told her of places of note in the neighbourhood, of fine old churches to be seen with interesting effigies, of rare pictures; saying with what pleasure they should show herself and her husband their collection, which was considered a good one, when they came to the Cedars; and ended by begging that their call might not be a mere formal one, but that they would name an early day and come to luncheon.

"I think we shall be able to while away an hour or two," said Sir James, "by looking at my pictures and my lady's china; all sorts of live pets, too, help to give us employment and amusement; and some of the views in the park may suggest subjects for your husband's pencil."

Geraldine readily promised to come, and they parted mutually pleased with each other.

Sir James was one of those delightful persons with whom you cannot long be a stranger—with whom you are at once at ease, and who you are certain will never become intrusive,—one who appreciated anything that was good, including "good fun"—and by that I mean, as he meant, "good" fun—wit never misdirected, never sharpened by ill-nature or poisoned by profanity—joyous, innocent

mirth and whim, which could always provoke laughter and never create ill-will. His very charming and elegant wife had less appreciation of the ludicrous than her husband, and her laugh was seldom if ever heard; but her smiles were very frequent, and they were so sweet and tender, that one would have been sorry to alter them into a laugh, however merry. She had an earnest face, more thoughtful than beautiful perhaps; but the unmistakeable stamp of high breeding was impressed on every feature, and the expression of her face gave an idea that "her thoughts were with her heart, and that was far away"—away in a brighter and better sphere, to which she hoped she was travelling, and the road to which she knew was difficult and thorny. But I do not mean by this she was sad; only earnest—earnest in everything she did, and

never losing sight of the one object for which she did everything. She went to town in the season with her young daughters, who were just out, visiting in all gay circles, to be seen at opera, Park, and fête, ever with the sweet, ready smile upon her gracious lips, but the deep thoughtful look in her hazel eyes, which told all who observed her narrowly, that, though "in the world, she was not of the world."

The departure of the Huntleys was succeeded by the arrival of a Mrs. Broadwood and her three daughters, whom Geraldine found painfully fatiguing company after her former charming guests. Mr. Broadwood was the rector of the next parish, and he and his wife being very fond of society, they made it a principle to call on every new comer within a possible visiting distance. She was

a stout, large-faced, loud-talking woman, giving her own opinions in the most decided manner, and seeming to consider when she had uttered them there was nothing more to be said. Her husband was a most extraordinary contrast to his wife, being very spare and short, with a weak, thread-like voice, and appearing to have no opinion about anything. Scandal said *she* was the rector, and he only the curate. His daughters were all three so exactly alike, it was almost impossible to distinguish one from the other. They all had a slight cast in one eye, and all lisped. Whether they ever differed in opinion at home, I cannot say, but in society they invariably agreed on every subject, so that whatever the eldest said was immediately echoed by the other two.

Geraldine found it very hard work to talk

to them, and Mrs. Broadwood had engaged Edith, with whom she was holding a very loud-voiced conversation, principally on matters connected with her own parish, which could have no possible connexion with, or interest for, Edith, her listener. Geraldine advanced a great many subjects, but could only obtain an "Oh, yeth," or "Oh, no," from the eldest Miss Broadwood, faithfully echoed by her sisters.

"Are you fond of the country?" at length she tried.

"Oh, yeth, very."

"Very," said the echo.

"Have you much ground to your own house?"

"Oh, yeth, a very large garden and thrubbery."

"And thrubbery," said the echo.

"Then I suppose," continued Geraldine, glad to have found something which could be answered with more than "yeth" and "no," "yours is that pretty place on the left as you drive into Gaysford?"

"Yeth, clothe to the church."

"Clothe to the church," repeated the echo.

"There are some fine trees there. I noticed a beautiful horse-chestnut tree."

"Yeth, the birdth thing tho thweetly in thummer-time in thoth tweeth."

"In thoth tweeth," softly murmured the echo.

This edifying conversation was happily interrupted at length by Mrs. Broadwood announcing that it was time to go, as she had to call at the Rectory; and so this agreeable family took their leave, greatly to Geraldine's relief.

A day or two after this, Geraldine asked Herbert if he would drive her to the Cedars, to return the Huntleys' call. He agreed to do so, and she went to Edith's room to ask if she would like to accompany them.

"If we take it gently, Fancy can do it very well. You won't mind the back seat. But what is the matter?—you have been crying!"

"Oh, nothing of any moment, dear, thank you; I am often silly."

"Well, a drive will do you good; we shall go in an hour's time;" and she was leaving the room, when Edith called her back, and in a hesitating voice said—

"Geraldine, I do not like to be interfering, but have you thought about the bills? We have been here some time now, and nothing

has been paid, and I know Herbert is very particular about the accounts being paid weekly. The people from the farm waited for the money yesterday for the milk and butter, and I paid it."

"Oh, did you? How much was it?" said Geraldine, carelessly. "I had better repay you. As to the other people, they must wait my convenience; and I am really not alarmed at Herbert at all, my dear."

She paid Edith at once, and left her with another injunction to be ready in an hour. Punctual to the moment came round the little carriage drawn by a very pretty cob, the whole concern having been a wedding present from her father to Geraldine, and the party set forth for their drive. Geraldine seemed unusually bright, and looked prettier than ever; she wore a muslin dress of the finest texture—a

white ground, on which fern-leaves seemed to have been scattered; a white bonnet, with white flowers and green leaves, fresh and beautiful enough to look as though she had just gathered them; a black-lace shawl, and light-green gloves, which fitted her delicately-made hands to perfection. She wore a small frill of Valenciennes lace in place of a collar, the dress being closed at the throat with a plain gold brooch,—studs to match in the sleeves at the wrists.

Geraldine had that charming art so necessary to a woman, of being always well and appropriately dressed, and it was a great charm in the artistic eyes of her husband, who would have been pained by ill-assorted colours, or slovenly, badly-arranged dress; but his wife, he was proud to own, was always dressed to perfection, and her lovely little feet and

hands were always encased in coverings quite worthy of the models they concealed.

Edith did not possess this art in the same degree; though always neatly dressed, she never looked so perfectly "got-up" as her sister-in-law; nor had she that nameless grace which made every movement of Geraldine a subject for an artist. She was so neat-handed, too, and never did anything clumsily or awkwardly; her pretty white fingers were skilful in all womanly occupations, and Herbert loved to watch her, with her small well-shaped head bent over her work, as the bright silk grew into flowers beneath her touch, or the braid took graceful patterns guided by those pretty hands.

Women are, without doubt, most fortunate when they possess beauty of person to help to rivet the charms with which they bind those

who love them. There is a mighty power in beauty, even when no charm of mind is united with it; but together, who can resist them? Geraldine was by no means faultless, but joined to her beauty was a bright, clear intellect, which enabled her to appreciate all that was worthy of admiration, and a most loving, affectionate disposition; and all the warmth and power of her love had she given unreservedly to Herbert. No wonder, then, that he loved her with a love which was almost idolatry, and which seemed to grow daily in intensity; so that, much as he had loved Geraldine Mowbray, still more dearly did he love Geraldine Lascelles. I think it would have been the same, in one sense, whomever he had married; that is to say, he would never have married any one unlovely or unloveable, but he would have loved her the more when

she was his own, because he possessed that perhaps happy weakness common to many men of setting greater store on his own possessions than any one else's. It certainly kept him from any danger of breaking the tenth commandment. Nobody's wife or maid, or ox or ass, would ever possess such charms for him as his own, and still more naturally did he value them when they produced a contrary effect on the minds of others; so that a beautiful wife had an especial power over him, and could, if she had willed it, have made him her very slave. Geraldine, however, had too much good sense to wish to make him one; she only loved him very dearly, and felt a natural pride in the knowledge of the power she possessed over him, which, as she said to Edith, prevented her being afraid of him. Many a time, as they drove along, did he cast

an admiring glance at her, and feel, as he gazed, that it really was pleasant to have such a wife, of whom he could never feel ashamed in any society.

And his quiet sister sat behind them, her thoughts for ever with him whom she feared she should never see again on earth ; careless of her own appearance, for whom had she to please ? So that beyond the fact of being neat, cleanly, free from all vulgarity of style, for her own comfort's sake, she cared little what she wore.





CHAPTER VI.

IN a neat little room of the cottage known as the gamekeeper's lodge, sat, on this afternoon, Harry Aylmer. He had been reading apparently, for a book lay open before him ; but whether it had ceased to interest him, or that a face seemed ever to come between the page and him, bringing him back to the true story of his own life, as full of interest and romance as the one he was reading, he had at any rate laid it aside, and, with his head buried in his hands, sat in deep thought.

One by one the events of his life passed, as it were in a vision, before him. He fancied he saw himself in a glass, depositing in his dressing-case twenty pounds, confided to him by the bank manager, to be given in the morning to a poor old lady who was in sad trouble, and whom the kind-hearted man wished to relieve.

“She lives very near you, Aylmer; take it for me, like a good fellow,—it will save me a journey. The morning will do, before you come into the City; she does not know it is coming, and so an hour or two will make but little difference.”

Was it a dream—that in the dead of night he saw a figure, clothed in white, slowly and softly stealing from his room? A dream? No! he was awake. It was his stepmother, his father’s wife, if he ever saw her. What

was the matter? He rose quickly, opened his door, and listened: there was no sound. Hurriedly returning, and slipping on some clothes, he went to his father's room and knocked. No answer. Again he knocked, and then he heard his father's voice say, "Yes, what is the matter?"

"Are you ill?"

"No—why?"

"I thought Mrs. Aylmer came to my room."

"No, boy, she is here asleep."

Then he must have been dreaming. Worried and bewildered, he remembered returning to his bed, and trying in vain to sleep, and falling, towards morning, into an uneasy slumber, from which he was aroused by his brother standing by his bedside, with a bright and cheerful face, trying to wake him.

He can remember rising quickly and dressing; hurrying through his breakfast to fulfil his errand before betaking himself to the bank; going then to his dressing-case for his money, and finding it gone! gone!—not there! What was to be done? The vision of the white figure stealing from his room, and that person he could swear to, as the being his father loved and trusted beyond all else, made his blood curdle. What was to be done? Could he condemn her? Would he be believed if he did? Courage, sense, seemed to forsake him. The manager was going out of town for some weeks; the old lady did not know the money was coming; would it be better to say nothing about it, and wait for a few days, in hopes of the money being returned? This he determined on, but a week passed and it was not replaced. He would

speak to his mother-in-law privately; tell her of his loss; picture the consequences to himself if it were not forthcoming; and hear what she would say. If he had been deceived, and that vision in his room had been a dream, still she would pity and help him. But he was mistaken; she had never liked him much, never taken the same notice of him as of his brother, and his statement only met with a scornful laugh.

“Who should know where the money is but yourself, boy? You must make your own story good to the manager—I cannot help you.”

Tortured by this indifference, stung to anger by her words, he spoke of the figure he had seen, and said, that figure was herself.

“Harry,” she answered, indignantly, “I scarcely know which most to condemn, your

infamy in taking money entrusted to your care, or your cowardice and impertinence in striving to fix the blame on me."

She had barely uttered the last words when the door opened and Mr. Aylmer entered, with an open letter in his hand.

"What have you done," he said, sternly addressing Harry, "with a sum of money entrusted to your care for a charitable purpose by Mr. Connolly?—it has not reached its destination, as you will see;" and he handed him the letter.

Perfect silence prevailed while Harry read as under, with difficulty deciphering the letters that seemed dancing before his eyes. It commenced with some business matters, and ended as follows:—

"By-the-bye, the day before I left home, I gave your son Harry £20, asking him

kindly to pay it into the hands of an old lady living within a stone's throw of your house. The next day I received a letter from her pleading sad distress, and in reply I told her I had sent her £20 through a friend, which I trusted she had received. To my astonishment, I this morning received an answer stating that she has had no such sum from anyone or seen any friend of mine. Will you ask your son about this, and request him to see about it at once, as perhaps the matter has escaped his memory?"

In silence Harry handed the letter back to his father.

"Well, Harry, what say you? Where is this money?"

"I do not know, sir."

"You do not know! What can you mean?"

“ I mean, it has been taken from my dressing case, where I placed it.”

“ Yes ; and—would you believe it ?—he was this moment accusing me of the theft !” said Mrs. Aylmer, laughing.

The father stood for the moment speechless, glancing from the one to the other ; and then came the fearful words, fearful from a father to his child,—banishment for ever from his heart and home.

Harry made no answer, never sought to vindicate himself ; he never intended his father should know of his wife’s sin, he had so hoped she would listen to reason and restore him the money ; but that hope was over, and in silence he patiently listened to his father’s words and received his unjust sentence.

All this passed in painful review before him as he sat there,—his parting with

Edith, her sad tears, her tender sorrow, without one word of reproach, though they had tried to make her believe it all. At such moments when these thoughts filled his mind he felt he could bear it no longer, that a life burdened with such sorrow must be laid down—no longer could he wrestle with his grief or remain under such an unjust accusation. Often when such memories had distracted him, had he stood beside the calm lake in the park, and felt that beneath its tranquil waters he must bury his troubles for ever; but between him and this sin there would stand a fair, slight form, with a sad, tender face and pitying, outstretched arms, seeming to say—

“For my sake outlive this wrong, and come back to the one true love which has never deserted you.”



CHAPTER VII.

SUDDENLY he was roused from this long reverie by the sound of footsteps, and laughter, and voices outside his cottage. Visitors, no doubt, to see the pheasants. How he hoped he should not be called ! Feeling at that moment so unfit to take up his assumed character and be the civil servant to his master, he seized his cap, hoping to escape at the back door and get away into the wood, but a sharp cry as of sudden pain from a woman's voice arrested him, and then Sir James's voice, saying—

“Good gracious ! is she much hurt? Carry her in here; our gamekeeper will be glad to render her assistance.”

Harry at once opened the door, and at one glance saw that the senseless form borne towards his cottage in her brother's arms was Edith Lascelles. What was to be done? would she recognise him? should he go or remain? A thousand thoughts seemed to bewilder him at once, yet he neither moved nor spoke, after pushing forward the arm-chair to receive the fainting girl.

“Shall we send for a doctor?” asked Sir James, anxiously.

“Oh no,” said Herbert, “I think there is no occasion; I believe she has sprained her ankle; I saw her stumble. See, she is recovering under Geraldine's care.”

Slowly Edith opened her eyes and tried

to raise her head from Geraldine's shoulder, who was tenderly supporting her.

"Why, Edith! what is it, dear?" said Geraldine, kindly.

"Oh! my foot; the pain was so sharp! How silly! Let me go, I am well now."

"No, no; be still a little longer. Elphick, do you possess a little brandy? If so, I recommend some to be administered to this young lady in some water," said Sir James, turning to Harry, who stood motionless at the end of the room. He made no answer, but going to a corner cupboard, produced from thence a flask containing some pale brandy, and hurrying from the room, returned quickly with some fresh water from the well.

"Thank ye, Elphick! We shall put the young lady to rights now."

Edith started; that name pursued her. Again Harry retreated, and seemed about to leave the room, when Sir James said—

“Stay one moment, Elphick! It strikes me we shall have to carry Miss Lascelles to the house, and may want your kind assistance.”

“Oh no,” said Edith; “I think I can walk; let me try.”

“Drink a little of this first, and then you shall,” said Herbert.

“I’m much better now,” she answered.
“I’m almost sure I can walk.”

She rose at once, but soon found she could bear no weight on her foot, and sank back into the chair.

“Ah! I feared so; we must make a litter and carry your sister, Mr. Lascelles. Can you find another man or big boy about, Elphick?”

and then, with two strong sticks through a chair, we can bear her along in triumph."

"I think I can carry her alone," said Herbert.

"My dear fellow, excuse me, but I am sure you cannot. Your arms have not even the strength of mine; neither of us could carry her comfortably to the house; we are farther off than you think."

Neither Sir James nor Herbert was a strong man. Harry, who had been accustomed to manual exertion from a child, had the strength of both of them combined, and the advantage considerably in height. Far too great a temptation to resist was the joy of once more holding Edith in his arms. At all risks he would try it, and advancing to Sir James, he said, in a low voice—

"If the young lady will permit me, Sir

James, I am sure I can carry her to the house without help."

"Can you? Well, you have my permission, I am sure, if you have the lady's," answered Sir James. "What say you, Miss Lascelles? will you permit Elphick to carry you? He says he can."

Herbert looked round at him—looked searchingly, too; but Harry, summoning all his courage, returned the glance boldly, and said, bowing respectfully to him—

"I think, sir, I can carry the young lady, if she will allow me; I am very strong."

Love is blind, they say; to the errors of its object only, then; for surely no instinct is so keen; it sharpens every sense to intensity. Who hears so quickly the distant footstep or the low-toned voice as those to whom the sound is music?—who sees the

smallest change of countenance, either to joy or sorrow, so well as those on whose heart the every lineament of that beloved face is written?—who feels the lightest touch of the hand, or even the very garment as they pass, as those who feel that very touch is worth living for?

That voice, never to be forgotten, even in the still hours of night, recurring to her, made Edith's heart beat quick and fast, till she could scarcely find words to answer the inquiry put by her brother—

“Will you let this young man carry you, dear?”

It was not refusal, Harry could hear. He flew forward, and in another moment Edith was raised tenderly in his arms, and he left the cottage with his precious burden, followed by the others. She closed her eyes,

and lay for a few moments as though she had again fainted, whilst he, during that short interval, was wondering if he dare whisper to her his secret. The rest had dropped behind him, for in his excitement he felt no weight or fatigue, and had walked on as swiftly as though unencumbered. There would be just time to tell her. He must. He bent his head low down to the sweet, pale face, and murmured, softly—

“Edith!”

The eyes unelosed at once. That voice would have wakened her from a trance. She gave a slight but quickly suppressed cry.

“Oh! Harry, I was sure it was you. What does it mean?”

“My darling! my treasure! I can tell you nothing now. See Dora Elphick; she will explain all. Hush! they are here.”

Herbert had hurried on and caught them, seeing some change in their movement.

"What is it? Is she faint?" he asked.

"A little, sir. I think the moving possibly——"

"Rest a little with her; it will be better."

Glad enough was Harry to do so, for the agitation of their recognition had made him tremble so, he could with difficulty hold her, light as she had seemed before.





CHAPTER VIII.

BENEATH a spreading chestnut tree he stopped, and gently laid his burden down, and then from beneath her closed eyelids he and her brother noted that large tears were slowly dropping.

“What is it, dear?” asked Herbert, whilst Harry retreated respectfully some few paces.
“Are you in such pain?”

“My foot aches very much, dear, and I feel ill altogether.”

“I shall be glad to get you home.—Sir

James," he continued, as he and Geraldine came up with them, "would it not be better to get our little pony-carriage brought here, put Edith in at once, and get home with her? She seems very poorly."

"It is quite possible, certainly; but I thought we had better carry Miss Lascelles to the house, and let my lady, who is a first-rate nurse, see to her. The ankle cannot be too soon bound up; and if we go through the shrubbery, the gate of which is close at hand, you see we shall be at the house before the carriage could possibly be got here. You are not knocked up, Elphick? You can carry her that much farther, can you not?"

"Oh yes, Sir James, certainly," said Harry; he could have added, "To the end of the world, if need be."

Once more, then, he raised the slight form so

dear to him in his arms, and, all too soon, found himself at his journey's end. Lady Huntley, seeing them approach from the drawing-room windows, hurried out to meet them, anxiously inquiring what was the matter. The story was soon told, Edith was laid on the drawing-room sofa, and Harry, with a bursting heart, moved slowly away. Herbert followed him to the door, to give him a gratuity for his civility. Poor Harry! few things had pained him or made him feel his position more than this; but fearing to betray himself if he refused, and thus destroy the hope of seeing Edith again, he took it with a simple "Thank you, sir," and touch of his cap. When he reached his cottage, he at once locked it up, hoping some day to be able to return it to Herbert, when he could smile at the past and the painful position he had then been in.



CHAPTER IX.



LADY HUNTLEY had rung at once for her maid to procure bandages and cold water, and with much care and skill was binding up the ankle, which had begun to swell severely. She then administered some restorative medicine to Edith, and with playful authority bid her lie quite still, and not move or speak till she gave her permission.

"Mr. Lascelles wants the carriage ordered, Emmeline," said Sir James, "at once, to take the young lady home as quickly as possible;

but my advice is, to remain quietly here. It is a long drive, and there is no medical man in the village. Now, we are fortunate enough to have one very handy, who could see Miss Lascelles and prescribe for her, if she will do us the honour of staying till she can be moved comfortably."

"Oh, yes, we have a doctor, Sir James," said Geraldine, smiling; "you forgot Mr. Tomkins."

"Ah, true, such as he is; but I should be sorry to place myself or any one dear to me under his care. Now, Barrow is really a very clever fellow. What say you, my lady?"

"I think your proposal an excellent one, James, if Miss Lascelles will trust herself to our care as comparative strangers. I fear she will suffer great pain in driving home, and I trust a day or two's nursing will at least enable her to drive home without so much

distress as it would occasion her now.—What say you, Miss Lascelles? will you trust yourself to me?" continued Lady Huntley, bending tenderly over Edith as she spoke.

Edith raised her eyes to that sweet, kind face looking down at her, and felt that it would be impossible not to trust, ay, and soon to love her.

"I shall be so much trouble," she answered with a faint smile, soon chased away by the acute pain of her foot, causing the deathly hue of faintness again to overspread her face.

"Not in the least, I assure you," said Lady Huntley.

"Don't think so for a moment," said Sir James, as Geraldine and Herbert, both thanking them warmly for their kind offer, said they could not entail such trouble on them.

“It is not the least trouble; Lady Huntley is never so happy as when engaged in some act of usefulness, and nothing pleases her better than a pet to nurse. I assure you all the sick animals are brought to her, besides all the sick poor; and all believe in ‘my lady’s’ prescription and doctoring, and make a point of getting well. Leave your sister with us to-night, and come and see her to-morrow. If she is as much better as I hope, she may, if she wishes it, drive home with you then, or stay as long as she likes. I can only say our house is perfectly at her service.”

The matter was therefore so arranged; and it was further settled that Mr. Barrow should be sent for at once, that his opinion might be heard before Herbert and Geraldine left.

He was luckily at home, and soon arrived. His opinion was that the ankle was badly

sprained, but that the young lady's nervous system appeared to have sustained a shock which required the greatest care and quiet to overcome; and he thought it most advisable she should remain where she was, if possible, and be kept cool and quiet. With the ankle he would not at present interfere; nothing was better than cold water and bandaging. He was a nice, gentlemanly young man, and appeared thoroughly to understand his profession; was kind without offensiveness, dignified without pomposity, gentle without effeminacy, and so entirely won Herbert's good opinion, that he determined, if a doctor was wanted at the White Cottage, to send for Mr. Barrow. As soon as he was gone, the Lascelles took their departure, reiterating their thanks to Lady Huntley, and promising to return the next day to see after Edith.

After their departure, Lady Huntley had Edith carried up to a delightful room looking out on the park, with a little window commanding a view of the lawn and a lovely peep of the surrounding country through a framework of trees. In the centre of the lawn was a large fountain, and the dripping of the water had a sweet, cool, soothing sound most pleasing to Edith's excited nerves. The room was most comfortably and elegantly furnished, and opened into a bed-room and dressing-room.

"There," said Lady Huntley, "you are to sleep, and my maid will be in the dressing-room ; she is a delightful little body, used to illness, and will pay you every attention. This bell rings into the servants' apartments, and this into her room, if you want her during the day. I shall now wheel

you up this little table, on which you will find plenty of light reading, tie this ribbon to the bell-handle, and leave you to some repose. The moment you are inclined for society, touch the bell, and either my daughter or myself will come to you immediately. Is that all agreeable to you?"

"Quite so, thank you. I really have no words to tell you how much I feel your kindness."

"I am quite glad you have not, because then you will not fatigue yourself by talking on an unnecessary subject. I can take all you feel for granted, because I know what I should feel myself—I should be greatly obliged to any one who would take care of me under the circumstances. So not another word, my dear Miss Lascelles ; only, if you think me deserving a reward, grant

me the favour of using my house and my servants as your own till you are well again;" and thus saying, with one more injunction to be sure to ring if she wanted anything, Lady Huntley departed.





CHAPTER X.



It was Dora's evening to meet Harry, according to his appointment; and so, after, as usual, arranging all her domestic concerns and leaving everything in order for her father and mother, she sallied forth to the trysting place. Mrs. Elphick, greatly to her credit, had always been very particular with both her girls, never allowing them the liberty so recklessly accorded to girls in their station of life. She had always made it a strict rule never to permit them to be out

after dark, or to walk alone with any young man. Dora therefore feared that she would greatly object to her meetings in the wood with Harry, and so purposely avoided asking her permission, for fear it should be refused, and she had no wish to be openly disobedient; and knowing how bitterly disappointed Harry would be if she did not grant him this interview, she could not find it in her heart to refuse, but started this evening, determining not to meet him again, but beg him to come openly to their cottage. Carrying with her the rose which her care had preserved for him, she walked quickly to the place of meeting. She was first there, but had not long to wait, when the quick, firm footstep she knew so well made the colour, as usual, forsake her cheek, and her heart beat loud and fast. How strange it is that the smallest sign of

preference is so quickly noticed by women, and the most striking evidence, seen plainly by every one else, is seldom observed by men! So it was that Harry never noticed the changes of colour or agitation of Dora's manner on meeting; engrossed by his own love, he never saw that he had taken captive the heart of the poor little village maiden, so that never could she fancy herself the wife of a common labouring man, such as she alone could hope to win. The refinement of Harry's appearance and manner was so painfully contrasted in her mind with the men she was accustomed to associate with, that she could not think for a moment of marrying amongst them—no, her mind was made up; she would remain as she was, or be the devoted wife, nay slave, if he wished it, of Harry Aylmer. Little did he dream all this

as he hurried to meet her, full of the news that he had seen Edith and actually had her in his arms; that she had known him and seemed still to love him. Little did he think how every word which proved his deep love for Edith wrung the heart of his listener. When he had excitedly poured forth his news, he asked Dora what she had to tell him. It was not much; she had only to say she had seen Edith, and that she had seemed sad, and had given her that rose, which ever since she had treasured for him.

“You dear, good little thing!” he said, as he took the rose from her and impressed a kiss upon its petals; “that was thoughtful of you! I shall never part from this while I live; and if I die, Dora, before I am reunited to Edith, I should like it buried with me. Sometimes I feel as if I must die and

throw down the burden I am so weary of carrying."

"Oh, hush, hush! do not talk so," said Dora, shuddering.

"Why, Dora, you little sensitive thing, are these tears—tears only at the very mention of my dying? You do not care for me so much as that!"

Dora had turned away, but as he spoke he put his arm round her and drew her towards him, looking round into her tearful face. It is very sweet to be loved by any one, and few men are proof against the charm. Dearly, truly as Harry loved Edith, he could not help feeling a pleasant sensation of gratified self-love, when the idea thus first suggested by her tears occurred to him, that this simple, innocent girl loved him; and the selfishness so grafted in a man's

nature made him indulge himself for the moment by noticing the effect his words produced. But, innocent and guileless as Dora was, she had excellent sense and still more excellent principle; she knew that Harry loved Edith, who in position was so much more fit to share his home, that nothing but her eventual desertion and his remaining in his assumed character could ever make it possible that she should be his wife; and so she knew how wrong it would be to betray to him the secret of her heart. Her tears were for the moment beyond her control; but when his arm was thrown round her, and she heard him addressing her in accents of greater tenderness and interest than he had ever done before, she felt now was the time to exert her self-control and maintain her own self-respect; so, releasing herself quickly from his

hold, she answered as she turned her face full upon him—

“How could I help feeling sorrow for your death, Mr. Aylmer?—we have been little children together; and I would be glad to see you back in your position and married to Miss Lascelles, with all this trouble done away, before you were called from us.”

Wise Dora!—the altered manner and the grave, respectful speech recalled him to himself, and reminded him of the distance between them—she was the carpenter’s daughter, his foster-sister, nothing more.

After a moment’s pause she asked, “And was Miss Lascelles much hurt?”

“I fear she was. I lingered about as long as I could, to see them go, and after an hour or two saw the carriage pass with only two persons, I am almost sure; I was too

far off at the moment to be quite certain, and it might have been some other people calling ; but I am of course most anxious to know whether she remained at the Cedars or returned home, and how she is. I shall try to-night, on some pretence, to go to the house and find out ; but in case she did not stay, I want you, my kind little messenger, to ascertain how she is, and meet me here again to-morrow night with your news."

"There is one thing I fear you will not like that I have to say this evening," answered Dora. "I cannot come here to meet you again ; I am sure mother would not like it, and I must not do it. Why not come to us?—you know how she and father love you, and are always glad to see you. Do come."

"But we cannot talk there, Dora, as we can here, and I am so afraid of discovery.

Should Lascelles discover that I was here, he would at once remove Edith, and I should lose the happiness of hearing from her, if not seeing her."

"No one would know you, that had seen you as you were when last in Bradleigh. We never have people in of an evening, and just walking into the house would not give them time to notice you much. They all know father got you the place at Sir James's, and calls you his nephew. Do come, for indeed I cannot come here again."

"Well, I will see ; at any rate, to-morrow evening I will risk it, if you will promise to go to the White Cottage and learn news of Edith."

"I will, indeed. And now I must go. Good evening—good-bye, Harry," she repeated, in louder and more careless tones, as the sound of footsteps coming towards them warned

her to keep up his assumed character in case any one should know them. Harry noticed the change in her manner, and looking behind him, saw through the trees the figure of a man approaching.

"I will walk with you to the stile," he whispered, "and see you safe into the open road; I had better." And so together they walked towards the end of the wood. The footsteps behind them quickened, and neared them so that they could hear the hard breathing close to them of one who had walked hurriedly. Dora turned to look, and clutched Harry's arm tightly as she saw it was Richard Sackett.

"What's the matter?" whispered Harry.

"It's Richard Sackett, and I'm quite afraid of him. Let him pass us," she answered, in the same tone.

"Afraid! not with me, Dora?" and Harry drew her arm through his.

"Allow me to pass, I'm in a hurry," said Sackett, gruffly.

They made way for him at once; and as he passed them, on Dora's side, he said, in a hoarse whisper—

"Oh! that's him, is it? I thought so;" and then adding aloud, "Good night, Miss Elphick!" hurried on.

Dora and Harry stayed for a moment when he had passed them.

"Why are you frightened at that man, Dora?" asked Harry. "Who is he?"

"Sackett, the miller. He is so violent-tempered. I always disliked him," she answered, hesitatingly.

"Shall I walk all the way with you? I will, rather than you should be frightened.

But why should you think he would hurt you?"

"I don't think he'll hurt me. But, oh! it's nothing; he only wanted to marry me, and I wouldn't have him, that's all, and he's rather cross. Never mind; you go now, and make haste."

"To marry you, Dora, and you wouldn't have him? Poor Sackett! no wonder he's cross. But why would you not have him?"

"Because I didn't like him. A very good reason, isn't it? But do go now. Good night."

"Well, good night, then, if you are sure you are not afraid to go alone."

"I am not, indeed; besides, he is walking so fast, he must be far out of sight by this time. Good night."

“Good night. This time to-morrow with some news for me, I hope.”

“Yes, at our cottage.”

“At your cottage. Good night.” And shaking her hand warmly, Harry turned towards home. Looking back once, he saw her standing watching him. He waved his cap, and she then moved quickly on; but when the trees had quite hidden her from his sight, she paused again, nor moved till the echo of his retreating footsteps had quite died away.





CHAPTER XI.



THOUGH Dora had refused Harry's escort, it was with some trepidation she went on alone. Her interview had been somewhat longer than usual, and it was growing late. Already one bright star had "set and kept its watch in the skies," and only a beautiful crimson streak on the horizon told of the glorious light which had been on duty all day. But once in the lane, she knew she should meet plenty of people going home; and so, with a quick, light step, she hurried on, and soon, to her

great delight, found herself nearing the cottage where she had, on the evening of her last meeting with Harry, taken some work, and saw children playing in the garden, and a little boy slowly driving some cows along the road home ; and her fears gradually faded, till she began to wonder why she ever had any. She reached home just as the light had so far gone that it was not possible to see anything indoors, and her mother was standing at the door watching for her.

“ You’re late, Dora.”

“ Yes, mother, I am rather. I stayed chatting to a great favourite of yours.”

“ Eh ! Who be that ? ”

“ Come in, and I’ll tell you.”

When her mother was again seated, Dora made her guess a variety of persons, and

finally, Mrs. Elphick having given it up, she told her.

“Why won’t he come here? He shouldn’t forget his old nurse. But there, it’s like the world,” she said.

“He don’t forget you, mother—only he’s so afraid of being known.”

“Ah, poor boy! Lor’ bless me, it seems but yesterday that I took him, a poor, sickly little thing, in my arms, thinking I never should save him, and wondering how any mother could send such a poor little thing away. But Mrs. Aylmer was a fine grand lady, who wouldn’t be bothered with children, and had a upper nurse pretty nigh as fine a lady as herself, who didn’t like the wailing of the poor child of a night, and so persuaded its mother that a wet-nurse was the thing for it, and it was brought to me. Dear! what a

difference there was between you and him ; so fat and rosy you was, with little mottled arms and legs—a regular pictur of a bab. Lor' ! how I used to cry over him ; and father, he used to say, ' I never see any one act the silly like you, Dolly. Why, one would think the little un was your own ;' and all the time he was every bit as choice over it as me. Dear, how pleased he was first time it toddled to his chair ! It had started in the morning ; so, thinks I to myself, I'll surprise father when he comes in. So at dinner-time I never said nothing ; the boy was asleep, and he woke up just as we'd done, and I took him up out of the cradle, and stood him down. Off he went, straight cross the room, to father. ' Lord love him,' says he, ' he is getting a man !' and just did kiss him. Ah ! well-a-day, time ago now." And the old woman

wiped her eyes with the corner of her apron, for the tender memory of the baby-days of her darling had moistened them with tears.

Dora had thrown aside her hat, and sat listening to this preamble of her mother with an interest one would scarcely have believed could have been caused by such a subject. But was not the darling of her mother's heart the worshipped idol of her own? Could the smallest thing connected with him, either past or present, fail then to interest her?

"I wonder, mother, what he has done, that his father should be so angry with him?" she said.

"Well, he told father it was about some money as he was thought to have taken, and then told some story about; and I can't be-

lieve it, for never whilst I had the child did he ever do wrong or speak an untrue word." I know there wasn't a better or more harmless creature living."

"He's coming down to-morrow night, mother, I think; at least, he said he should."

"Oh, is he? Well, I shall be glad enough to see him. Mind and have some of they nice tea-cakes for him, Dora; we'll make him as comfortable as we can when he do come."

"I wish he'd tell us all about it—what he has done, I mean, or what they say he has. He knows we should never blame him."

"Poor lad! he doesn't like talking of it, likely. Here comes father; lay supper, dear, and make me a drop of gruel, like a good girl. I'd rather have that than anything."

Dora rose at once to do her mother's bidding, thinking the while of Harry and his troubles, and imagining how she could learn at the White Cottage any news of Edith before the next evening.

True to his promise, the following evening Harry arrived at Bradleigh. They had waited tea for him, and though it was considerably beyond the usual hour for this meal, Mrs. Elphick would not hear of beginning without him, and Harry felt as though the past few years had only been an ugly dream, and that he was again a little happy boy, as he sat once more at the humble board where he had taken so many a meal in his innocent childhood. When the tea was cleared away, Dora asked him if he would come and see the garden, and look at the spot where they used to possess a little landed property of their

own, consisting of a small strip of ground each, in which they planted a fine crop of stones mixed with a little mustard and cress, and sometimes a potato Elphick might have dropped when sowing his, which when it grew and blossomed caused them immense delight, as they produced sundry dishes of potatoes for their dinner out of their very *own* garden. Harry gladly went with Dora to this scene of their childish recollections, and he wanted to tell her that he had discovered Edith had remained all night at the Cedars. This Dora had also learnt in the village; and as they talked together, Dora led the subject to that which had been on her mind so long, —what it was that had caused such severity on the part of his father.

“Well, Dora,” he said, “I don’t mind telling you, because I think you will believe what

I say. You would not think me guilty of an act of dishonesty, would you?"

"Nothing could make me, but your telling me so yourself," answered Dora, fervently.

"Thank you, dear Dora. Well then, I had some money entrusted to my care to pay away, and I placed it in my dressing-case in my bed-room, and in the night, Dora, it was taken away."

"Taken away!—stolen!"

"Yes; at least, when I looked for it in the morning to take it to its destination, it was gone."

"And you have no notion who was the thief?" asked Dora, eagerly.

"Further than the fact that the money is gone, and that I am supposed to have taken it for my own use, I can tell you nothing."

“But, Mr. Aylmer, it must have been some one in the house!”

“God knows, Dora; and in His hands I leave it. When He thinks fit, I shall be cleared from this charge, of which I am perfectly innocent.”

“But it is so unjust that you should be turned out of your home for what you don’t deserve. Can nothing be done to prove your innocence?”

“Nothing, I fear. But if only Edith would believe my innocence, and consent to be my wife, how gladly would I toil for her, and in our humble but happy home forget these last wretched months. I am not ambitious. To earn an honest living, and have in my home the light of her smile and the priceless treasure of her love, would be all on this earth I desire; but her brother would not hear of it,

and probably, poor girl, refuse ever to see her again if she consented to be mine, unless I can stand acquitted before the world."

"But surely, Mr. Aylmer, you will try to set yourself right; you won't go on always like this? Think what your father must suffer!"

"To right myself, Dora, I should of necessity put some one else wrong, and, it maybe, pain my father more. Besides, I have no proofs; circumstantial evidence is all against me, and I must bear it patiently."

Dora made no answer; a sudden thought had struck her from Harry's last words, and in that moment she made a resolution which she prayed Heaven would give her strength and wisdom to carry out. After wandering in the garden a little while longer, they

re-entered the house ; and any one might have ceased to wonder at the love which had filled poor little Dora's heart for Harry, had they been witness to his conduct in that humble cottage home that evening :—his gentle and patient listening to the long stories of poor Mrs. Elphick, drawled out in her whining voice ; his efforts to amuse Elphick in conversation suited to his comprehension, on subjects which he knew would interest him ; all showing that no accident of position could make him other than he was,—a true gentleman, whom it was impossible to believe guilty of a wrong or dishonourable action.

After supper, which Dora had taken the greatest pains to make as tempting as she could, he took his departure. Dora walked to the garden gate with him, and as he held out his hand to shake hers at parting, she

started and turned pale, for Richard Sackett passed the gate, and with marked emphasis said, "Good evening, miss—very pleasant, isn't it?"

"Why, Dora, that's your friend again. I say, he'll shoot me."

"Oh, Harry—Mr. Aylmer—don't say so!"

"You silly little thing," said Harry, laughing. "I think I'm a match for him; and besides, he sets too great a value on his own neck, I suspect, to risk it in twisting mine. Run in—you look cold and white. Good night." And whistling a merry tune, Harry walked quickly on; and Dora, with a sinking heart, re-entered the cottage.



CHAPTER XII.

EDITH had been two days at the Cedars, and was mending slowly—the ankle, at least, becoming less painful; but her mind, harassed by the glimpse she had caught of Harry under such strange circumstances, prevented her nerves from regaining their tone, and her spirits their usual equanimity; for, though gaiety had deserted her since their sad separation, still she had seldom given way to any outward demonstration of grief, and the ordinary observer would have been unaware that any

sorrow disturbed her; but now bursts of hysterical weeping seized her repeatedly, causing both alarm and anxiety to her kind hostess. Lady Huntley felt almost sure that something more than the constitutional disturbance from a sprained ankle must occasion these paroxysms, and determined to ask Mr. Barrow at his next visit if he did not think there was more wrong than appeared. Mr. Barrow smiled at her ladyship's question, and answered—

“In the course of our practice we have many such patients, Lady Huntley. Miss Lascelles is suffering, it strikes me, from a complaint beyond my art. If we knew the right physician to call in, I think I could answer for the cessation of these troublesome attacks which distress her and you.”

“What do you mean?” asked Lady Huntley, looking earnestly at the young doctor.

“Doctors are compelled sometimes to look to the mind to find the disease from which a patient is suffering; and in searching there I have discovered, I think, Miss Lascelles’ complaint. If your ladyship has not also divined the cause of her continued nervous depression, I feel I have no right to say more than that some secret sorrow disturbs the young lady and prevents her return to perfect health. The ankle is doing as well as possible.”

“I think I understand you, Mr. Barrow. Poor girl! we can only leave her to One who, having sent her the cross, will give her strength to carry it.”

When, after this conversation, Lady Huntley returned to Edith’s room, she found, to her great relief, that she was quite composed, and talking almost cheerfully to her two nice girls. Very charming

specimens of young ladies they were—fresh, innocent, merry things; free from all affectation; neither rough and bold nor foolishly shy; worthy children of their excellent mother. She had taken the greatest pains with them, never left them to the care of servants or governesses alone, but watched them from their earliest days with the devotion of a true mother. She was of Mrs. Fry's opinion, that no "Christian mother should put from her own hands the first duty of her existence." She looked at nurses and governesses only as persons to act for her in her compulsory absence; and by her wise and excellent management the claims made on her time by her children never interfered with her duty to her husband. Unless in a case of illness—when she considered both parents were bound to make a sacrifice—she

never permitted "the children" to be any excuse for not being with her husband at any time when he required her presence; and his house was as well ordered, his guests as well attended to, as though no children were in the house. Dearly was she loved by her little ones in return for her devotion to them. A grieved look in her kind, earnest eyes was more painful to them than the heaviest punishment; and the gentle reproach, after any misdemeanour, conveyed in the words "I thought you loved me," was enough to cause tears of penitence and earnest promises of amendment. The constant society of their mother, and the careful way in which she selected their companions, preserved them from that peculiar silly manner, so common to many young ladies, which has been aptly termed "missy." They had no

secrets to whisper and giggle at; they placed the fullest confidence in their kind and indulgent mother, and she in her turn courted and deserved it by entering into all their plans, sympathizing with their sorrows, rejoicing in their joys, and heartily enjoying their fun. She found them, when she entered Edith's room, one on the ground at the foot of the sofa, bathing the ankle with lotion, the other sitting beside her, showing her some new work she was doing. All were laughing and chatting merrily as she entered.

"I am not come to disturb you," she said, "only to ask how my patient is; and I think I can see she is better."

"Much better, thank you, Lady Huntley," answered Edith; "and your kind girls are doing all in their power to amuse me; but I

have just discovered they are staying home from some archery party because you are going out to dinner, entirely on my account. Do not let this be, dear Lady Huntley, or I shall feel I am really an intruder here."

"Indeed, mamma dear," cried both the girls eagerly, "we do not want to go. Do help us to convince Miss Lascelles. Connor let it out—it was so silly of her—she came and asked us what time we would dress."

"I assure you, Miss Lascelles, my naughty girls are glad of any excuse which liberates them from the infliction of a country party."

"Yes," said Edith, smiling; "they have been amusing me with an account of the people they should meet. I think Miss Huntley is an excellent mimic."

"Rather too good; we quarrel about that sometimes,—do we not, Margaret?"

"Yes, dearest mother, but only to Miss Lascelles you don't mind my just illustrating my stories with sketches of our friends. She recognised Mrs. Broadwood and her daughters immediately."

"Anything you can do to while away the long day for Miss Lascelles I am willing you should do, but yours is a dangerous talent, dear child, as I often tell you, and so must be confined strictly to our own circle. Nothing offends people sooner, you know, than to be made a laughing-stock of."

"Oh, yes, I know. I should be sorry that any one whom I do imitate should know it; but if people will be peculiar, they lay themselves open to being caricatured, do they not?"

"They are not in the least aware they are peculiar, remember, dear, and may be

at the same time thinking you so. Many of the oddities of grown-up people arise from little tricks of childhood, unnoticed perhaps, or at least unchecked, until the habit has been confirmed. You would have utterly ignored the letter *r*, but for incessant pains on my part; 'Round the rugged rocks the ragged rascals ran' being part of your daily lessons for a long time."

"Yes, people are too apt to laugh at and find amusement in their little childish tricks," said Edith, "till the children begin to think it funny, and make no effort to correct themselves."

"Yes, that is very true, Miss Lascelles. My old nurse thought it was so pretty to hear Margery talk about the 'wose' and the 'wocking-horse,' and was quite vexed at me for insisting on correcting her. Lisa, too,

had a lisp which would have rivalled Miss Broadwood's, but I am thankful to say we have mastered that now."

"But do you not like, mamma dear," said Lisa, "the imperfect talk of little children? I think it is so much prettier than the precociously plain way in which they mostly speak now. Little Arthur Helstone talks like a boy of twelve at three years old."

"As in everything else, dear, I dislike extremes. For a child to be encouraged to talk in a language utterly unintelligible, and spoken to in the same way, I think very unwise; but the pretty effort children make to speak plainly, when encouraged to do so, is very engaging. There must be perforce many words which they cannot utter distinctly, and their ignorance of the rules of grammar is at first very entertaining. I

delight in 'Yes I are' up to five years old, but after that age Murray should have more respect paid to his memory. And, though I hate men and women of seven and eight, I think at that period girls and boys should begin to 'larn manners,' as old Betty Barnes says."

"Talking of manners, Miss Lascelles," said Margaret, "were you too ill to notice the manners of our gamekeeper the other day—the man, I mean, who carried you here from his lodge? I never saw any one in his station of life so charming. I'm really quite in love with him; dear mother lives in perfect fear that I shall make a més-alliance and form a subject for a sensation novel by eloping with my father's gamekeeper, who will afterwards be shot by some noble lord who is dying in love for me. Really,

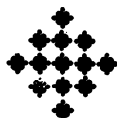
I am seriously thinking of writing the novel myself before the events have become matter of fact."

"Hush ! Margaret," said Lady Huntley, "Miss Lascelles is faint ; you have tired her, talking, I fear."

Edith's rapid changes of colour during this speech had caught the observant Lady Huntley's notice, and she attributed it of course to the gay chatter of the girls having been too much for her. Little did she think the romance that was enacting in her own house, or how truly Mr. Barrow had discovered the cause of Edith's illness.

Forbidding further conversation, after administering some restorative to Edith, Lady Huntley said she should carry off the giddy Margaret and leave quiet Lisa in charge, and hoped Miss Lascelles would try an hour's

repose; thus, happily for Edith, preventing any necessity for a reply to Margaret's unfortunate question.





CHAPTER XIII.

T was very trying to Edith to lie there helpless, knowing Harry to be so near, and yet unable to see him or learn the meaning of his strange position ; the short interview with him had roused again the feelings which she had been struggling to control since their separation, and re-awakened the weary yearning to hear his voice and see his face again. If she could only get home she might go to Dora, and hear from her, as he had told her he should, the history of his assuming this

menial position ; and yet the hope of seeing him once more induced her to remain where she was, for at least it was sweet to know herself so near him, and to indulge the dream of again meeting him and hearing his explanation from his own lips.

Accordingly, she very readily consented to Lady Huntley's suggestion, made on her next visit to Edith's room, to try the effect of a little air ; she had a low basket-carriage and a little Shetland pony, which could be led through the grounds quite gently, and she really thought it would strengthen her nerves. So it was settled ; two of the servants carried her downstairs in a chair, and with the two girls walking at either side and a boy leading the pony, Edith started for her little airing. Delightful was the feeling of once more passing through the pleasant summer air, en-

joying all the sights and sounds of that sweet time. Lady Huntley had herself arranged the carriage with cushions so cleverly as to render it as easy and comfortable as the sofa; and a feeling of happiness seemed to steal over Edith to which she had long been a stranger, and for which she could not account. There seemed to her as though a dawning of better days was at hand,—that the cloud which had overshadowed her and him she loved better than herself was passing away. It might be from the relief she experienced from the severe pain she had endured for some days, but any way it was a peaceful, sweet sensation, for which she raised her soft eyes to the blue heaven above her in thankfulness and praise.

“You do not feel the least tired, do you, Miss Lascelles?” asked Margaret at

last, after leaving Edith in silence during the first part of the drive.

“Not in the least; I am so comfortable, and enjoy it too much to speak.”

“I thought so, so I would not talk to you; but if you are not tired, perhaps you would like to go out in the park.”

“I should excessively,” answered Edith, as a bright flush coloured her cheek.

“Go through this gate into the park, James,” said Margaret to the boy, “and go towards the Home-wood; it is so pretty there. We cannot get in from this end with the carriage; but we can go beside it; and it is so pretty to look into a wood, I think, and catch that peculiar delicious smell there always seems about it—see occasionally a stately pheasant move along, and then take wing at the first sound with a loud ‘whirr.’

Oh ! I love a wood, and can find amusement there for hours. We may probably see our fascinating gamekeeper, too ; he is generally about there ; and he will be charmed, I am sure, to see the lady of whom he took so much care able to be out again."

Edith made some reply, but not much to the purpose, and the little carriage moved on in the direction indicated by Miss Huntley.

When they reached the gate of the wood she suggested they should draw the carriage up under the trees and go into the wood themselves in search of flowers and wild strawberries for Edith.

"While you meditate, Miss Lascelles," said Lisa, laughing ; "we shall not be out of you want us."

"Pray do," said Edith ; "I shall be quite happy here ; it is a lovely spot."

“Be sure and call us, James, if Miss Lascelles wants us,” said Margaret. “Come along, Lisa.—Now for a scramble, a thousand times jollier than that awful archery party, Miss Lascelles,” she continued, looking back laughingly, and nodding to Edith as she clambered over the stile, followed by her sister. The boy seated himself at some distance on the turf, and amused himself by chewing little pieces of grass which he pulled up; and the shaggy little pony, Blackberry, entertained himself very much in the same manner by cropping the short sweet grass too, and munching it with evident satisfaction. And Edith lay back in the easy carriage, gazing up into the thick foliage above her, and through it to the intense blue sky, which looked down upon her like a loving eye. She could hear the merry voices of the girls

in the wood, and the blithe singing of the birds, and the lowing of cows in the distance, and the trickling of a little stream which seemed to have lost its way in the wood on the road to some river—that water was as clear and bright as crystal, and a great boon to parties who came there often to pic-nic;—and she listened to it all with the same pleasant sense of repose and happiness which she had experienced from her first starting in the little carriage. She was presently aroused from her quiet thoughts by a sudden bound over the stile of two handsome pointers, who ran up to the carriage, snuffing round the pony's legs, and putting their forepaws up on the wheels, and hurrying about in that busy meaningless way in which happy dogs just freed from a chain like to disport themselves; and they were quickly followed by a fine

stalwart figure of a man with a gun over his shoulder. It needed but the quick beating of Edith's heart to tell her Harry Aylmer stood before her. She was very pale as he advanced to the carriage, and respectfully touching his hat, said—

“Good day, miss; I am glad to see you; I hope you are better.”

Edith murmured a reply as she bent her head down over one of the dogs, which was trying to court her favour.

Harry drew nearer, and said, in a very low voice, “I have sent the young ladies on a wild-goose chase after some orchises. I will get rid of the boy now.—James,” he said aloud, “will you be kind enough to run back to my lodge with Grouse? he is not well, and has no business out. See, I will tie my handkerchief through his collar, and you can lead

him ; for he will not follow you. I'll mind your pony ; I have asked the lady's permission." The boy rose directly to do his errand, glad to please Harry in anything, for he was the little son of a poor widow who lived near the park gates, and to whom Harry had shown endless kindness. Away he started with the dog, and Harry returned to the carriage. "The young ladies bid me tell you they were gone for orchises, and if you wanted them I was to return for them," he said, smiling. "You do not want them just yet, my own one, do you ?"

"Indeed no, Harry ; but tell me, dearest, quickly, why you are here in this capacity. I have been longing to know."

"My father bid me earn my living, darling, and suggested Australia, but I could not leave England whilst it contained *you*. I saw an

advertisement in the paper to the effect that a gamekeeper was wanted here. I knew it was in my old favourite childish haunts, and made friends with my dear old nurse's husband, Dora Elphick's father, to get the situation for me: they did, under the name of their nephew. I am here, and then comes the blessed news that you, my treasure, are within a mile or two of me. Oh! how light the toil has been since then, for I have ever been cheered with the hope of seeing you and hearing you tell me you still love me."

"Still and ever, my dear Harry. But how long is this to last? are you never to be restored to your position? are we both to linger out our existence like this?"

"No, Edith, I have the firmest faith that I shall one day be righted, and my daily and hourly prayer is that our lives may be spared

till I can come forth boldly to claim my bride, with the proud consciousness that I have never done anything unworthy of her love, and that her faith and trust in me have been unshaken. But, darling, we must both have patience. I cannot prove my innocence, as I have told you, without accusing another. I should not be believed. I have no proof but my own eyes—no witness. I must bide my time. The very hint of my suspicions to my father has caused him to visit my supposed offence with such harshness. So nothing more can be done at present: only continue to trust me, and I shall bear it. And you, dear one, are you better?"

"My foot is much better, but my nerves have been so shaken by our meeting. The joy of seeing you again though, dear, and hearing you once more assert your innocence, will

do me more good than any doctor. I shall leave the Cedars to-morrow or next day, for I must not longer intrude on their kindness, and then you may suppose I shall be a constant visitor at Dora's cottage. Hark ! I hear the girls."

" All right. I will stand by the pony's head."

But before they appeared in sight the little boy came running back, and as Margaret and Lisa came over the stile, took his place at the pony's head ; and Harry, respectfully touching his cap, whistled to the dog and moved away.

" Look ! here are lovely flowers for you, Miss Lascelles ; but that naughty Elphick has disappointed us shamefully by saying that we should find at a certain place in the wood some fly-orchises, and when we reached the spot there was none to be seen. Has he been congratulating you on your recovery ?"

“ Yes ! what lovely flowers,” answered Edith, hurriedly changing the subject ! “ Are they for me ? Thank you ! Wild flowers arranged with ferns and grasses make a lovely nosegay.”

“ They do, indeed,” answered Lisa. “ I suppose we had better get home now ; mamma will like to see you before she goes out to dinner, to hear how you have enjoyed your drive.”

More than she could tell them had poor Edith enjoyed it, for she had seen, as Dr. Barrow had said, the right physician, and felt refreshed and strengthened, and better able to sustain the weight of the cross she strove to carry in silence and submission.





CHAPTER XIV.

ONE lovely evening, a few days after Edith's interview with Harry, Dora Elphick was seated at her old place among the roses in the lattice window, when the creaking of the garden gate, giving notice of visitors, made her raise her head from her work, and to her surprise she saw Edith Lascelles coming up the walk. She quickly rose, and went to open the door to her.

A bright blush covered Edith's pale face as she saw Dora and asked her if she could speak to her about a dress.

"Certainly, miss ; come in ;" and Dora showed her into the pretty parlour. Edith, glancing hastily around, saw that the room was unoccupied save by themselves ; and, the colour mantling deeper on her face, she said—

"It is not only about a dress I would see you ; it is about—about Mr. Aylmer. You are his foster-sister, I think ?"

"I am," said Dora, falteringly, as in her turn her colour deepened.

"He said," continued Edith, "you could tell me much about him, and yet perhaps I have seen him since you have."

"Have you, miss ? Oh, how glad I am !—how happy it must have made him !"

Edith smiled a kind smile as she answered—

"I think it made us both as happy as we can be in our sad circumstances."

"Sad ?" said Dora, inquiringly.

“Do you not think them sad? Parted!—and for such a reason! But perhaps you do not know all.”

“I know, miss, that Mr. Aylmer is suspected of having done a wicked action, and that your friends believe it; but *you* do not, miss;—and you love him, and he loves you.”

“True, or we should not feel our irrevocable separation as bitterly as we do. Our very love is now our sorrow!”

“Is it? Oh, Miss Lascelles! it must be such a blessed thought through all, to know that, all they can do, they cannot take away his love from you; and that after this world and its troubles are ended you will be together for ever, however much they may keep you apart here!”

“We are young, Dora,” answered Edith,

sadly ; “ a long weary life, in all human probability, lies before us.”

“ But brightened by a hope of a better morrow,” said Dora, earnestly ; “ indeed, indeed, all will be well yet, and Mr. Aylmer’s innocence be established before the world. I believe it. Believe it too, miss ; it *will* help you so.”

“ I will—I do try, Dora. I may call you Dora—he does.”

“ Indeed you may, miss, and I hope, if it is any comfort to you to talk to a poor girl like me, you will come often. I can tell you of him as a little child—of his kind, pretty, loving ways then, and his goodness to father and mother ever since. You would like to see mother, perhaps,” she said, suddenly ; “ she nursed him when he was such a tiny baby.”

“ I should like to see her if you can rely

on her not revealing—that is to say, you know, my friends must not know you have any connexion with Harry, or that anything brings me here but to employ you.”

“Oh, certainly not, miss. Mother loves Mr. Aylmer too dearly to say a word to hurt him or you.” And so Dora fetched the old body, and, with tears in her eyes, she seized and kissed Edith’s hands, as she said—

“Oh, miss! stand by him and love him through all; he is as innocent of wrong as when he lay a wailing baby in these old arms. I believe it as I believe that there’s a God in heaven. And when my time comes to leave this world, I shall die in peace if I know that you will cling to him so long as you live. He has no mother, poor child; no one, I may say, to love him but you—not as should love him; his nearest and dearest

have turned against him, and there's only his poor old nurse that's stood by him through all, and never doubted him. But the love of a poor, old, ignorant, doddering creature like me is no comfort to him; but your love is another thing—never take it from him, deary, but let it comfort him through all this heavy trouble.”

Edith's tears fell too fast to answer for a moment this earnest address. Dora had turned away, and among the muslin on the table there rested large drops which were neither rain nor dew. At length Edith said—

“My faith in him, and love for him, can never alter, Mrs. Elphick; but the question is, will my health stand this long wretchedness. Sometimes I think poor Harry will have only the memory of my love to comfort him.”

"Oh, Miss Lascelles," said Dora, eagerly, "do not say that; treasure your health for his sake; bear up bravely; for what would he do if you were gone?—Mrs. Lascelles!" she said, suddenly, as the creaking of the gate having again given warning of a visitor, made her look to the window, and, with the greatest promptness, she threw off Edith's shawl, turned her with her back to the light, that the traces of tears might not be seen, and snatching up some calico, began pinning it to Edith's dress, as if taking her pattern.

"Now, mother, open the door," she said. And by the time (as the old lady's movements were very slow) she had shown Geraldine into the room, Dora had a capital pattern of a body fastened on Edith, and in polite accents was asking if she thought it would do.

"Edith, dear," said Geraldine, "I have

come to help you home. Susan said you were here, and I thought your ankle would ache with this first long walk."

"Thank you very much. I shall be ready in a moment. If you will send up to the White Cottage, Miss Elphick, any time to-day, the maid will give you the silk."

"Thank you, miss, I will send in about an hour's time; or perhaps, if you are not in a great hurry for the dress, I could come myself for it to-morrow."

It had suddenly struck Dora that Harry might possibly look in that evening, and she might have something to communicate. Whether Edith took the hint or no, she acceded to Dora's suggestion, and the two ladies departed. They walked slowly home in silence; both seemed full of thought. Geraldine spoke first.

“That worrying man, Crawley, has been to-day for his bill again. He came whilst you were away, and I told him it was not convenient, and just now he has been again. It’s so annoying. I hate bothering dear Herbert for money; I only had some on Tuesday, to pay the butcher. I told this stupid man to come down in the evening and I would pay him; but I really hardly know what to do. I shall begin to allowance the servants with candles and soap; the bill is fearful for the short time we have been here; and as to the scouring paper, I believe Susan eats it, she cannot use it all—we haven’t plate enough to require so much cleaning.”

“Plate, dear! they don’t clean plate with it.”

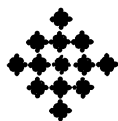
“Oh, well, whatever it is—I don’t know what they use it for, but cleaning something.

It's ridiculous," said Geraldine, growing rather red and tossing back her head with a pretty little air of contempt which was very becoming to her. "I think Susan is awfully wasteful—the pounds and pounds of candles she gets through is shameful."

"She does not seem to use them wastefully either. I have always quite small pieces in my candlesticks."

"Oh, you always take her part, I know!" said Geraldine, sharply, quite forgetting how, a few weeks back, she had asserted that Edith hated Susan and was always finding fault with her. But Edith made no answer; she saw that Geraldine was worried and uneasy, and that it was not the time to add to her irritation by contradiction; but how much she wished that earlier Geraldine had taken her advice to look over and pay her bills

regularly, as she had always; for she saw, "though no bigger than a man's hand," now, a cloud in the distance, which would, she feared, bring a storm of trouble into the once happy wedded home of her young sister-in-law.





CHAPTER XV.



AS soon as they reached the cottage, Geraldine went at once to the room which Herbert had fitted up for his studio, and where she knew she should find him painting.

He was so engrossed with his subject that he never looked round when the door opened, nor knew that any one entered, until he felt a pair of arms round his neck.

“Now which of you plagues is it?” he said; “let me guess—oh, I know the hands, there are no others in the world like them. My little queen! where have you been?”

“Only up the village to help Edith home ; she is still a little lame. How nicely you are getting on ! I hope your pockets are full of money, both quite full, for I want to empty one.”

“You do, you rogue—what for ? You surely have found nothing attractive in the shops here—it’s the very inducement I had for coming.”

“No, dear ; but candles and soap must be paid for, you know.”

“Oh, house-money you mean. But, you extravagant puss, where is all I gave you on Monday ? I thought that would last you a twelvemonth.”

“Did you, sir ? Then you are grievously mistaken. Give me some more, like a good boy.”

“Oh, dear me !—well, how much ?”

“Ten pounds may I have?”

“Yes, my precious, ten thousand, if I had it!” And kissing the beautiful face uplifted to his, he gave her the money, and thus peacefully ended this first money trouble which had worried Geraldine; and as she kissed him tenderly in return, she thought he was the best and dearest husband that had ever lived, and that Edith must have strangely misunderstood him, to dream he would be angry about such a nasty thing as money.

Dora was right in her conjectures that she should see Harry that night; he was most anxious to tell her of his interview with Edith, and so about tea-time he entered the little cottage. They had both much to tell and hear, so that it was growing late before Harry rose to go. They had again talked over the affair of the money, and Dora had,

with woman's tact, put such leading questions to Harry as had entirely confirmed her first suspicions and strengthened her in her resolution. She saw him depart more hopefully than usual; for, in her loving devotion, she had conceived a plan which she hoped might release him from his present painful position, and unite him for ever with his darling Edith.

Harry walked on quickly, for it was late, and he had work to do when he reached home. The wind had got up, and heavy clouds scudded across the sky. The moon was rising, but every now and then her fair face was covered with clouds, so that the evening was darker than usual at the same hour. The nearest way to the Cedars was across the copse, but Harry hesitated for a moment whether it was light enough for him

to see his way through it; but he finally decided to try, as it would save him at least half an hour, and he had accounts to make up and much to do before bed-time. His quick walking soon brought him to the entrance of the copse, and jumping over the stile, he got into the narrow pathway at once, and found that he could easily distinguish it. It looked like a white thread winding through the dark mazes of the wood.

As he went on, thinking as usual of Edith, and weaving bright dreams of future happiness, he was startled by the sudden appearance of a man in the path, for he had heard no footstep, nor seen him, until he was close upon him. He must have come from a side pathway, or been amongst the thick trees.

“So she’s not with you to-night, then?”

were the first words he heard ; and looking hard at the man, whose features he could not distinguish for the failing light, without close scrutiny, he discovered it was the object of Dora's aversion, Richard Sackett.

"Are you talking to me?" he asked.

"I am."

"Well, what did you say, then? for I was thinking, and did not hear you."

"Thinking of *her*, I reckon!"

"Oh, yes, thinking of her, of course," answered Harry, good temperedly; "but let me pass, please, for I'm in a hurry."

"Not yet—I want a word with you."

"It must be a very short one, then, my good man, for I tell you I'm in haste."

"Haste or no, you must hear me. We are alone here. I'm afraid of nothing. I'm strong, stronger than you, and armed," he

whispered. "So you'll wait till I've done with you."

Harry was no coward, but to hear these words in a dark wood, with night coming on apace, was by no means pleasant, for he, as ill luck would have it, had not, on account of his visit to the Elphicks, his gun with him, which he almost invariably carried; so, as discretion is the better part of valour, he answered him still good-humouredly, saying—

"There's an old saying, 'Needs must,' &c.; so go on, let's hear what you have to say."

"I have to say this—that that girl you love will never be your wife!"

"How do you know that?" asked Harry, eagerly, surprised off his guard by this seeming allusion to the subject so near to his heart.

"Because I do, that's enough for you."

Because there's another man as loves her better than his life, and who'll take good care that you shall never have her!"

"What do you mean? and how on earth is it that you seem acquainted with me and my affairs?—I know nothing of you, and am sure you must be mistaken in the person you think you are addressing," said Harry, sharply.

"No, no, I'm not mistaken; I know you well—have watched your meetings—taken note of all; and now give you this warning—give her up, or you'll chance to rue it!"

At these words a new light dawned upon Harry; until that moment, there being only one person for ever in his thoughts, he had deemed the man was alluding to Edith; but as he spoke of their meetings, he at once remembered his passing Dora and himself twice, and greatly relieved, he laughed as he answered—

“My good man, I knew you were mistaken—utterly and entirely, if you are alluding, as I presume, to Dora Elphick. I have not the slightest intention of making her my wife; so pray do not alarm yourself, but allow me to pass you, wishing you a very good evening and success. ‘Faint heart never won fair lady,’ you know.”

“No, no, that won’t do,” said Sackett, placing himself again before him as Harry endeavoured to pass him; “you’re shirking now. I’m too old a bird to be caught with chaff. No nonsense; promise me there shall be no more o’ they meetings—that you’ll have done with all that, and not with your fair face and fine speeches wheedle her away from one who’s known and loved her years before ever you saw her—or one of us two goes no more out of this place alive!”

“You have either been drinking or are out of your senses,” said Harry, very calmly, “or you would not talk so wildly. You have no right to exact promises from me, nor am I to be frightened into compliance. I tell you once again that I have no intention of marrying Dora. We have been friends many years; cousins we call ourselves. You know I am called Elphick, do you not? Now be reasonable, and act like a sensible man. If you kill me, you will be hanged; if I kill you, you will still be as far from your object. I know, my good fellow, what it is to love, and I feel for you. I love dearly, but not Dora Elphick. Let us be friends and not enemies, and I will do my best for you with the pretty Dora.”

“Are you in earnest?” said Sackett, in a much milder voice, looking hard at Harry.

“I am quite in earnest, never more so; my

life is not such a bright one that I would preserve it by stooping to a lie. If I loved Dora, and she loved me, I should be proud to own it ; for she is as good and true hearted a girl as ever lived, and worthy of any man's love. But my heart is elsewhere, Sackett. Come," he said, "it is growing quite dark ; let us go home quietly, each of us, after shaking hands on our bargain. There is mine, will you not take it?"

The wind was whistling through the trees and swaying the branches to and fro, and the moon, which showed strange, fitful lights occasionally as the clouds scudded past it, shone out brilliantly for a moment as Harry ceased speaking, showing clearly Sackett's deadly-pale face. He made no reply, but drew slowly from his breast-pocket a pistol. Harry started forward and tried to seize his

arm, but Sackett was too quick for him, and cocking his pistol he fired it—in the air; and then seizing Harry's hand, he said—

“I can shake it now with a clear conscience. I have read that ‘a soft answer turneth away wrath,’ and I never found the truth on't till this moment. God bless you with your love, and help me to master mine!”

Harry wrung his hand warmly in return; and the two who had met—one, at least, with deadly feelings of hatred to the other—parted the best of friends and mutually interested in each other's fortunes.





CHAPTER XVI.

THERE was a large dinner-party at the Cedars—one of those painful duties we are supposed to owe to society, particularly if we own any rank in it—the necessity to ask once or twice a year a number of persons to dinner, in whom and for whom we have neither interest nor affection.

The gentry of the neighbourhood received the honour of an invitation to the Cedars twice a year, and Lady Huntley moved amongst them with a kind speech and sweet smile

for all, till each one felt himself a welcome guest, and believed that Lady Huntley would have been really disappointed if he had not come. Still nothing could be duller or heavier than these parties, though Sir James did his best to enliven them ; but they were of the highly respectable class who cannot understand wit, and are for ever under the impression that a joke is something wicked.

The party on the evening in question consisted of Mr. and Mrs. Broadwood and their three daughters ; a Mr. and Mrs. and Miss Curran ; Mr. Heavitree, the rector of Bradleigh, and his son, who was "down" from Oxford, and giving the "governor a day or two ;" Mr. Barrow, Geraldine, Herbert, and Edith ; making, with the family party, eighteen to dinner. Margaret and Lisa detested these dinner parties usually, but this evening Mar-

garet appeared quite delighted, so much so that Lisa remarked on it whilst they were dressing.

“I shall be so glad when I’m undressing, Margery, instead of dressing; but somehow to-night you seem not to agree with me.”

Margaret laughed—a little sort of nervous laugh—as she answered—

“What nonsense, Lisa! don’t I always agree with you about the intolerable stupidity of our country parties?”

“You generally do, or I should not remark the difference to-night: you come up usually with the most listless air, and fling on your things, all the time wishing you were not obliged to go down; but to-night you are as brisk as a bee, and really look quite pretty.”

“Thank you, dear Lisa,” said Margaret,

laughing merrily ; “ such an unusual circumstance as that must occasion you surprise.”

“ No, no—I do not exactly mean that, darling,” said the gentle-hearted Lisa, kissing her sister ; “ you are always pretty to *me*, but what I mean is that you look so bright and—and different somehow.”

“ Oh ! Lisa, you’re a goose,” said Margaret, stooping to do something to her shoe, and rising with a very warm face—from the exertion, doubtless.

“ Well, I know what I *think*,” said Lisa ; “ I believe Mr. ——”

“ Hush ! here’s Connor,” said Margaret, quickly, as the door opened and the maid entered with some white hollyhocks and maiden’s-hair ferns she had been to get from the gardener to put in her young ladies’ hair.

“Oh! that’s right, Connor—that’s lovely! But make haste; we shall be awfully late.”

“No, miss, I think not; my lady has scarcely begun to dress.”

“The more reason we should be quick, or there will be no one in the drawing-room to receive the people.”

Lisa glanced at her sister with an arch smile, but made no answer.

Very quickly Margaret completed her toilet, and went down to the drawing-room, where she remained alone for some time, and at the first ring of the hall bell her colour went and came quickly, so that Lisa would have again laughed at her, had she been witness to her agitation. The door opened, and the servant announced “Mr. Barrow.”

In silence Margaret offered him her hand, then stammered some apology for mamma,

“who would be down directly”—and there was again a pause. Margaret began turning over some prints as though she had never seen them before, and Mr. Barrow gave a variety of preliminary coughs as though he was about to make a speech, but the speech either stuck in his throat or he could not arrange the sentences, for no effects were produced. Another loud ring, following the sound of wheels, suggested something to speak of, and Margaret ventured to say it was probably the Lascelles.

“Is Miss Lascelles quite well again?”

“Quite well, I believe,” said Margaret.

“Don’t you think she is very pretty?”

“Very interesting is more the word, I think. She is not my style of beauty.”

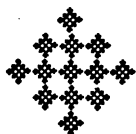
Margaret looked again hard at the prints, and her reply was interrupted by the entrance of Mr. Heavitree and his son.

“Ah! my dear Miss Huntley, how do you do? Early, I fear, but my watch gallops and I thought we should be late. Our friends the Lascelles are not far behind. Barrow, how do you do?” and the old gentleman rubbed his hands and pulled down his waistcoat, and seated himself in a very comfortable chair, looking exceedingly well satisfied with himself and all the world. The son bowed a stiff bow to Miss Huntley, and a more careless one to Barrow, and then glancing at a mirror opposite, ran his fingers through his long hair, and sunk on to another chair with an air which seemed to imply that even living was an unnecessary fatigue. Margaret seemed to have found her tongue now, and chatted brightly to Mr. Heavitree, and even induced Mr. Ernest Heavitree to exert himself sufficiently to comment on the

topics of the day which Margaret advanced, changing from one to the other with a perfect knowledge of her subjects, until her mother and sister appeared. And one after another the guests arrived, and that fearfully dull half-hour before dinner was got over with that effort to make it agreeable—always apparent, do what you will. The men have come to dinner and want it, and are wondering when it will be announced; the women are thinking of their baby they did not leave quite well, or that their daughter Julia, or Emily, or Isabella, as the case may be, will not be taken in to dinner exactly by the party they should prefer; and so the time hangs heavy till that delightful moment when the door opens and the stately butler announces “Dinner is served.”

Margaret fell to the share of Mr. Ernest

Heavitree, and Lisa was taken in by Mr. Barrow, so that both young ladies were glad enough to see Lady Huntley's signal to move into the drawing-room, neither of them approving of their position.





CHAPTER XVII.

RRIVED there, they soon made up a little coterie with Edith and Geraldine, leaving, naughty girls, to Lady Huntley the pleasing duty of entertaining the rest of the guests, having thus picked out the plums for themselves. Miss Curran and the Miss Broadwoods drew near each other and began talking about work and "schoolth," as Miss Broadwood said ; and poor Lady Huntley had to endure Mrs. Broadwood's account of the difficulty she had had to get a mistress for

the infant school, and how provoking the choir was—how they would have their own way and sing what they liked ; followed by a long history of how her cook would sell the dripping instead of giving it away in the village. “And she puts it all inside her bonnet,” she continued, causing Lady Huntley to open her large eyes in astonishment ; which Mrs. Broadwood observing, she burst into a loud laugh and said—

“Not the dripping, my lady, I don’t mean, but the money she gets for it, you know : it’s all spent in flowers and trumpery. Oh, dear ! I do think servants are the most detestable people in the world. Do you find them very troublesome ?”

“Not in the least, Mrs. Broadwood.”

“Ah ! I forgot, though : you, of course, have a housekeeper to do all your dirty work

in the way of scolding and discharging and hiring, and know nothing about your establishment."

"Indeed you're mistaken," said Lady Huntley, with one of her sweet smiles; "I know every one of my servants, down to the little scullery-maid, who is, by the way, an especial favourite of mine, and she and I have only this very morning been talking over whether she could not manage to put away some of her wages each quarter. I could tell you the birth, parentage, and education of them all, and Mrs. Mantle never discharges one without first coming and stating their offence to me."

"Then if you know so much about them as that, you must know what a troublesome, ungrateful set they are."

"I must have been singularly fortunate, Mrs. Broadwood. I hear many people say

so, but I have not found it out yet. You see, I never begin by expecting to find them faultless: I suppose them to be full of human errors and frailties, like myself, and without the advantages of education to soften and control them. I remember that they are brought up in little cottage homes, without the care and discipline and order which make us see dirt and disorder so much quicker than they can. I remember that they seldom see meat, or that if they do it is on Sunday, when the little piece has to last them all the week, so that they are wasteful when they find an abundance on which no value seems set. I remember, too, that it is natural to young women to love dress, and that the temptation to spend their money on it is one very hard to resist, and requiring more moral courage than we exert ourselves. And so I try to be patient

with them and treat them well; and I assure you I have had the happiness of seeing several of my servants comfortably married, and thanking me for the lessons of prudence, neatness, and economy I had taught them."

"Well, every one knows you are an extraordinary person, different to the rest of the world. If more were like you, it would be a better world, I'm sure."

Lady Huntley smiled at the compliment, but moved away, having had enough of this entertaining conversation; and at the moment the gentlemen entered, and Lady Huntley sent Lisa and Margaret to the piano to sing a duet. After them Miss Curran, who was considered a great performer, gave them a very elaborate piece of Thalberg's, which she executed with what she doubtless thought great effect; if noise was an essential, she certainly was right.

During her performance Margaret walked out into the verandah, for it was very warm, and stood leaning against one of the pillars, looking quite a picture in her soft white dress with its numerous skirts, and the white hollyhocks in her dark hair. The Huntleys were not exactly pretty girls, but they had beautiful hair and complexions, and being slight, graceful figures, and always dressed simply and tastefully, they never failed to attract attention, and in all society their entrance into a room met with the question, "Who are they?" Margaret was the brightest and most animated-looking, and had more colour; but Lisa had tender eyes and a delicate, gentle look about her, making sufficient contrast with her sister to raise the question as to which was the best-looking. Margaret's joyousness generally gained the day, but Lisa was not

without her admirers, and, if the truth was told, was rather mamma's pet.

Margaret was not long in the verandah without a companion. A low voice pronouncing her name made her look round, and she encountered the earnest gaze of Mr. Barrow.

"What a lovely night," she said, "is it not?"

"Lovely; but will you not catch cold?"

"Oh, no; that's a thing I never do. I make a point of never doing anything so inconvenient."

There was a pause, and both looked at the stars in an earnest manner, as though studying those beautiful orbs; while, if the truth was spoken, they at that moment neither of them knew there were any in the sky. At length Mr. Barrow said—

"Did it ever occur to you what was the matter with Miss Lascelles?"

"A sprained ankle, was it not?" said Margaret, wondering at the question.

"I think it was something more than that. Was not some sorrow afflicting her—some heart sorrow? Such griefs are hard to wrestle with, Miss Huntley—worse than pain of body. I have known the brightest spirits cowed, and merriest laugh silenced, by such a sorrow."

Margaret made no answer.

"I am sometimes consulted in such griefs," he continued, in an interrupted voice, "and just lately I have been asked to decide and give advice in a very difficult case. A person I know has been, through force of circumstances, thrown constantly in the society of one whom to see is to love; but she is in high place and station—he only a humble individual, working for his daily bread. He has

a strange, wild hope that she whom he loves is not indifferent to him. He cannot make up his mind which is right—to escape altogether from the dangerous influence, and make up his mind never again to see her, or tell her at once of his love, and run the risk of being ordered from her presence and the house, if not by herself, at least by her parents. What advice would you give if this question were asked you, Miss Huntley?”

While he had been speaking, the bouquet of hothouse flowers Margaret held had somewhat lost their beauty, for one by one she had pulled the petals from several of the blossoms, and they were lying at her feet; but she answered him quietly, saying—

“I should bid him be sure that he was loved before he spoke, and then speak fearlessly.”

"You would?" he answered, eagerly; "in spite of the difference of rank, you would bid him tell her that he loved her, and perhaps make her despise him for his impertinence?"

"She could not despise him for loving her; she might for leaving her to suffer alone, if she loved him."

"If! Ah, Miss Huntley, how is that to be made a certainty—how is he to know——"

"Oh! how very thweet and pleathant it ith out here," said Miss Broadwood, stepping out on to the verandah. "Oh, dear, I didn't thee you two were out here alone. Oh, I am thorry. I'll retire, I'm thure," she continued, giggling behind her fan.

"There is not the slightest occasion, Miss Broadwood, thank you," said Margaret, haughtily; "Mr. Barrow is not more afraid of two ladies than one. You will not drive him

away, I daresay; and the air will not be the less pleasant from the fact that you wish to enjoy it too. It is excessively warm in the drawing-room."

"Yeth, it ith, dreadfully," said Miss Broadwood, checked in her ill-timed jesting by Margaret's quiet dignity. "I think it likely we thall have a thorm. *I* find there ith generally a thorm when the weather ith tho hot."

This novel idea, which Miss Broadwood propounded as her own, neither of her listeners seemed disposed to reply to; indeed, Mr. Barrow politely requested her to allow him to pass and return into the drawing-room, when he took up a book in a corner and remained apparently absorbed in it. There was a little more music, to which no one seemed to care to listen, and a little more

uninteresting conversation, and then one by one the guests departed.

"Oh, Barrow," said Sir James, calling him back as he was leaving the room, "look in to-morrow some time, will you? I want to talk to you about my man Williams; he's far from well."

"Certainly, Sir James, I will be here about twelve o'clock."

"Yes, that will do; good night." And, shaking him cordially by the hand, Sir James returned into the room, and Mr. Barrow went through the ante-room to go out into the hall. Whether he missed his way in a fit of absence, or really had forgotten which turning in the hall led to the front door, he certainly found himself in Sir James's library, the door of which stood open, and a lamp burnt there, giving a very feeble light, as though warning

all guests that it was time for their departure. Standing by the table, with her back to the door, stood a lady with that white dress like clouds round her graceful form, and those white flowers in her glossy hair. He knew that dress by heart, every fold of the drapery, the number of the skirts, the soft lace about the body and sleeves — it was Margaret Huntley, he was sure. Some power stronger than his will, it seemed, drew him into the room; he entered, and stood in silence behind that graceful figure for a second; the lamp failed more and more, its light growing dimmer; the girl moved forward as if to alter it, but before she could reach it it was out. At the moment she felt her hand seized, and uttered a slight cry.

“Hush! hush! it is only me, Arthur Barrow. Let me speak one word to you. If

I am too presumptuous, you have made me so by your words to-night—you shall not despise me for being too cowardly to brave repulse and indignity for your sake. If I am driven from the house, at least I shall know that though you cannot love me, you will not despise me. Margaret, I have loved you dearly since first I saw you. Have I the faintest hope that I do not love in vain?"

It was not Margaret's voice that answered, in low tones—

"Mr. Barrow, I am sorry thus strangely to have learnt your secret. I will tell Margaret you wish to speak to her if you will come here in the morning. I do not know if I am right in betraying her, but I cannot help saying I think you may hope."

Before the bewildered lover had time to answer, Lisa was gone. Rushing into the

hall, Barrow seized his hat, and in a tumult of excitement and confusion flew out of the house. They were calling Lisa as she entered the drawing-room.

"Come, my child," said her father, "we want to go to bed. Where have you been?"

"I forgot to write a note, papa, and went to do it in the library; but the lamp went out in the middle, so I am as badly off as ever. However, it's no consequence. Is Margaret gone up?"

"I think she is; she said her head ached."

"Then I'll go. Good night, papa—good night, mamma;" and, lifting up her sweet young face for the customary good-night kiss, Lisa went upstairs to bed.





CHAPTER XVIII.

WHEN she reached the room which she by choice shared with her sister, she found Margaret seated in a low chair, the flowers she had taken from her hair in her hand, but no further advance made towards undressing.

“Oh, Lisa dear, I have sent Connor to bed—I thought you would not want her,” she said, as Lisa entered.

“Quite right, love, I do not want her at all. Have you had a pleasant evening?” she asked, coming up to her sister, and placing her hand caressingly on her head.

"Oh, yes, pretty fair ; but how insufferable those Miss Broadwoods are—and Miss Curran is very uninteresting—and that odious Ernest Heavitree ; fancy having to go in to dinner with him !"

"It was a shame ; I was a little better off with Mr. Barrow, was I not ?"

"Yes, a little. I'm wretchedly tired, too tired to get undressed. I feel as if I could sit here doing nothing till to-morrow."

"Let me undress you, then,—shall I ?"

"Oh, no, dear, thank you," said Margaret, jumping up. "I'll make a desperate effort and begin."

"I think we shall have Mr. Barrow here again to-morrow, Maggie."

"Do you? Oh, dear ; this brooch always hangs in my lace ; help me, dear, or I shall tear it. Does yours catch ?"

“No, I think not.”

“Ah ! you are so much gentler than I am, and have more patience with things. I do everything in a hurry, and nothing well.”

“What a modest opinion of yourself, Madge. I think there are some people in the world who have a very different opinion of you and your attainments.”

“You for one, eh ? Lisa.”

“Yes, dear, and some one else too that I could name. Maggie dear, has it never struck you that Mr. Barrow loves you ?”

“Oh ! Lisa—Lisa—hush !” said Margaret ;
“I dare not think it, even if I would.”

“Why not, love ?—Margaret darling,” she said, taking her sister’s hand fondly between her own, and looking round into the averted face which she saw was wet with tears,
“what is it ? would you be sorry if he loved you ?”

"Yes, Lisa, for his sake; and though I could not help a selfish joy if I knew he loved me, through it all I should grieve that I had made his life so wretched."

"Wretched! why wretched, Maggie? Would you not accept him if he asked you?"

"Lisa! mamma, papa, what would they say?"

"All that is kind, I am sure; they only wish our happiness."

"We are talking foolishly, Lisa; let us forget it. Mr. Barrow will not think of me."

"Margaret, one word; if he came and asked you to-morrow to have him, would you say yes?"

"No. I would only tell him that I loved him better than he could love me, but that we must think of each other no more for mamma's sake. She is so good, so kind;

and I know it would grieve her to think, with only two of us to marry, one had chosen only a country practitioner. If he loves me it will be noble and right of him to tell me so ; and we shall both be happier, even parted, knowing that we love and understand each other. Every one must have a 'romance' in their lives, Lisa ; if we are brave and resolute we shall master this, and in after years, if we live, marry, each in our own station, and look back on this as a sweet dream we once had."

"I don't understand you, Margaret," said Lisa, "at all ; if I loved any one and they loved me, I should go and say, 'Mamma dear, we love one another so much, let us be married.'"

"And mamma's dear eyes would look at you tenderly and sorrowfully," answered Margaret, "and she would say, 'I suppose it must be

so, my child ;' and she would go through all the preliminaries of the wedding, and never reproach you, but would carry to her grave a sorrow inflicted on her by her own child—a sorrow which a little resolution would spare her. If it were necessary to have my limbs cut off to save my life, for my own sake I should say *no*—for mamma's I should say 'yes.' I would bear that pain for her—I can bear this. I should want chloroform, Lisa dear, you know," she said, with a sad smile that was more touching than her tears ; "and to know that he loved me would be the chloroform to help me to endure this pain."

"But, Margaret," persisted Lisa, "you could not marry any one else, loving him ; and would not that make mamma quite as sorry?"

"Oh dear, no ! She would only think

then, I loved no one well enough to marry them, and preferred remaining at home. Lisa, Mr. Barrow has relations in trade; and, though I myself care nothing about it, still I am bound to consider mamma's and papa's feelings. Papa can trace an unbroken pedigree to the Conqueror; what would he think of his daughter having to acknowledge a brewer for a brother-in-law? No, if Mr. Barrow does speak to me, I will tell him it is impossible, and then we will try how brave we both can be."

"I cannot understand it," said poor little Lisa; "and I only hope I shall never be so unfortunate as to love any one like that, because I must either marry them or lie down and die. But, Margaret, one thing I had better tell you, dear. It is not guessing—I *know* Mr. Barrow loves you."

And then, whilst Margaret, with burning cheeks, and eyes wet with tears, listened, Lisa told her of her interview in the library.

"And he will come to-morrow, and you will not make yourself and him unhappy, Maggie. Let me tell mamma in the morning, and hear what she says—will you, Maggie?"

"No, sweet, dear sister," said Margaret, kissing the little earnest pleader tenderly. "Let me manage it my own way. Oh, Lisa! I am very selfish; for I shall go to bed happy that he loves me, notwithstanding."

And so, with her head on her sister's shoulder, Margaret slept that night, her heart full of a strange happiness, and her dreams haunted by one form and face.





CHAPTER XIX.



AT the time when Sir James, on the following morning, was lingering about waiting for Mr. Barrow, according to his appointment, a note was delivered to him instead, which merely contained an apology for his non-arrival, but that he had been called to a serious case some miles off, and should not be able to see Sir James that morning; but the following, if agreeable to him, he would come. A second note from the same quarter was placed in Connor's own hands, to be given to Miss Huntley.

Margaret, who, from Lisa's account, had been in momentary expectation of seeing Mr. Barrow walk in, since she first came down in the morning, had betaken herself to her own room, to try and quiet the agitation which seemed momentarily to grow worse. There Connor brought her the note, and with trembling hands, guessing from whence it came, she broke the seal, and read there the declaration, which, after his mistake of the previous night, Barrow had not the courage to make in a personal interview. Again and again she read those sweet words of love, and large tears fell on them, as she felt that she must, in duty to her mother, reject that love she was so proud to have gained. In her estimation, Arthur Barrow was faultless. His gentle gravity—so great a contrast to her own vivacity—charmed her first; and

the good impression was confirmed by witnessing his skill and tenderness as a doctor, which she had seen in his daily attendance on Edith Lascelles, and the fact that, in all the cottages belonging to her father's tenantry, she heard his name uttered with praise and love. To have aided him in his labours as far as possible, and made a bright, happy home for him to rest in, when the day's work was done, would have been to her the summit of earthly happiness. But she could not see her mother, her darling mother, pained and disappointed by any act of hers, and so resolutely determined to perform this Quixotic act of devotion, and refuse, for her sake, the only man she had yet seen whom she would wish to marry. Several letters were begun and torn up before she could write one she liked to send; but at length, blistered

with the tears which she could not control as she wrote, she determined to send the following :—

“When I tell you that I consider your wish for me to become your wife the highest honour I can ever have paid me, and the acknowledgment of your love the greatest happiness I have ever known, you will scarcely understand the apparent inconsistency which makes me reject both. The obstacle you have yourself foreseen. It is for my father’s and mother’s sake I make this sacrifice—and I may *now* confess to you that it is one. Believe me that, though rejected, you are not despised. Let us try each to be brave, and learn ‘to suffer and be still.’ That God will bless and prosper you, and help you to overcome this sorrow, is the heartfelt prayer of

MARGARET.”

Whilst she was busy writing this important letter, her little sister Lisa was busily employed in her service. Notwithstanding her prohibition, she had determined to speak to her mother on the subject, and see if nothing could be done to make the lovers happy.

Lady Huntley was working in the room called the morning room when Lisa entered.

"Mamma dear, I want to speak to you very particularly; can you listen to me?"

"Surely, my pet; what is it?"

"I hardly know how to begin, because I fear I shall vex you. I do not know that I should have the courage to do this for myself, but I have come to beg for others."

"Now, what can it be?" said Lady Huntley, laying down her work and looking up at Lisa with a smile.

"Mamma dear," said Lisa, kneeling down

by her mother, and taking her soft white hand caressingly between her own, "Mr. Barrow and Margaret love each other; may they be married?"

"My dear child, what do you mean? are you earnest?"

"I am, indeed, dear mamma, and you will not say no, will you? You would not like to see our dear bright Margaret's face saddened, and her merry voice and joyous ways all hushed and silenced. She had better marry a good man and be happy, than a duke and be miserable, had she not?"

"My dear girl, I am too astonished to make you any suitable answer now. If Mr. Barrow is in earnest, of course he will speak to your father; we will wait till then. I never dreamt of this;" and Lady Huntley passed her hand across her forehead with a look of

sorrow, which Lisa noticed at once, and said quickly—

“Margaret declares that, much as she loves him, she shall refuse him, because she is sure it would make you wretched; but I know she is only sacrificing herself, and so I thought I would come and see what I could do for her. Let her have him, dear darling mamma. After all, what are rank and titles?—very little here, and nothing hereafter,” continued Lisa, blushing as she spoke at thus preaching, as it were, to her mother.

“True, my child. Believe that neither your father nor myself will for any mere worldly reason interfere with your happiness, either of you; but it is a matter requiring the gravest consideration and most prayerful thought. Estimable as the young man may be himself, he has relatives which Margaret, nurtured and

brought up as she has been, would never be happy amongst. This might cause unhappiness and disunion to mar their married lives, and so not even accomplish the object we should have in putting aside our own feelings for hers. Mr. Barrow is very superior to his relations. I have seen his father and mother, and I must admit it would require perfect belief in our Margaret's happiness to console me for being connected with them. But we will say no more about it, Lisa, till I hear from Mr. Barrow or Margaret, and I have consulted with papa."

"Darling mamma, we would neither of us pain you if we could help it, you know."

"I do know that, love, thank God. Where is Margaret?"

"In her own room, momentarily expecting Mr. Barrow, I think."

“I will go to her presently. Mr. Barrow’s not coming this morning ; he has sent word so to your father.”

“Oh, I did not know that ; I thought he was coming to see Margaret. I will tell you how I came to know all this ;” and she briefly related Barrow’s mistake in the library.

Lady Huntley could not forbear a smile at the relation, vexed as she was at the untoward occurrence ; and saying that probably Margaret had received a note from Mr. Barrow at the same time as her father had received his, and she would go to her at once, Lady Huntley, dismissing Lisa with a loving kiss, went upstairs to Margaret’s room.

She was so engrossed in her occupation, that she did not hear her mother open the door. Lady Huntley stood watching her for a moment ; saw her seal and direct her letter,

with the large tears dropping on the paper. Then she gently pronounced her name. Margaret turned quickly. Her pale face met her mother's loving gaze,—the tenderness and sympathy expressed in every line of it proved that she knew her secret.

“Oh, mother! mother!” she cried, and flew to the shelter of those loving arms, and wept out there her first bitter sorrow.

When she was a little calmer, her mother spoke—

“My dear girl, have you refused him?”

“I have, mamma; I knew you could not like it.”

“Dear child, you have nobly shown your love and duty; but your father and I have but one aim on earth, your happiness here and hereafter. If a marriage with Mr. Barrow could promote this, no worldly consideration

should for a moment influence us. But you are very young, and I think and believe that this is a brief romance, which would end, if you married, in a sad reality. Mr. Barrow is an estimable young man in himself, but his relations! Margaret, my child, you never could bear to call his mother 'mother,' or his brothers and sisters your brothers and sisters. Still I think it so sad that this poor young man should suffer for his position, which is no fault of his, that I will, and I am sure your father will agree with me, write to him and say that if, after two years (you will then be one-and-twenty), you are both still in the same mind, we will make no opposition to your union; but there must be no engagement, and you must continue on the same terms as before this. Do you consent to this?"

"Oh, yes, dear mamma! you are too kind."

"You will during that time be considering how you shall like the altered position of Miss Huntley and Mrs. Barrow, calmly and considerately, taking it in all its points, robbed of all its romance. And I shall trust to your honours that no word is said of love or marriage, or the slightest idea of such a thing allowed to get abroad until the specified time."

"You may rely on us, mamma dear, I am sure."

"Very well, then; give me your letter, I will enclose it in mine. It is well he should see what a dutiful child you are—the best proof that you will be a good wife. Now you look flushed and excited, so take yourself out into the air, or lie down here by the open window, trying to dismiss all agitating feelings with that hopeful and consoling thought that all things are ordered and pre-arranged by a

higher Power, and that what He wills and orders is best and happiest for us all, and can be set aside by no human power."

And thus Lady Huntley left her child far happier than she had found her, and more than ever assured she had the best and dearest mother in the world.





CHAPTER XX.

“**D**ORA—Dora !—dear heart alive ! where is the girl ? Perhaps she’s in the shop,” and Mrs. Elphick hobbled out as quickly as her rheumatism would let her to see for her daughter. She had come downstairs somewhat later than usual, and found the breakfast laid, kettle boiling, and all as usual save the customary presence of Dora at her little work-table ; and as calling produced no effect, she imagined Dora had gone to summon her father to his breakfast.

"Is Dora here, father?" she asked loudly, endeavouring to make herself heard above the noise of hammer and saw.

"No; I ain't seen her this morning," said Elphick: "is breakfast ready?"

"I don't know if the tea's wet—it's all laid, but I can't find Dora."

"Oh, she'll be there presently—against you get back, like enough; go on, I'm a-coming; I want my breakfast."

The old woman, stumbling amongst the shavings, which lay in heaps in the shed, hobbled back again, but on her return found no Dora. Elphick came in and insisted on their commencing breakfast. "She'd come presently," he said; "she was out a gossiping—her tongue was too long by ever so much." But the meal was ended, and still no Dora. Mrs. Elphick began to cry—something had

happened to her, she was sure; and Elphick himself grew uneasy, and taking his cap from the nail, said he would go and look for her. He went from neighbour to neighbour, but none had seen her.

"She was up betimes, I know," said Mrs. Briggs, "for I thought I was earlier than common, but looking across the road I see your house all open. Wherever can she be got to?"

"Lor' me, I ain't set eyes on her," said the baker's wife; "she's never gone off with no one, sure. A steady girl enough as seems, but you don't know no one, do you?"

"I know my girl better than that," said Elphick, gruffly, turning away.

"Law, she ain't been and drowned herself, like you do read on?" said a woman at the next cottage, who had come out to see

what Elphick wanted going from house to house.

"Oh, no," said another, tempted by the like curiosity, "she ain't one o' that sort, I'm sure; more like she's fell in the well, drawing up the bucket. I'd have it searched."

With nothing more comforting than these assurances, Elphick returned to his cottage and angrily rebuked his wife for sitting and crying, and not doing something, though what she was to do she did not know, nor could he tell her.

"He'd lay, big as she was, he'd whop her when he caught her, if she was playing any of her fool's tricks on them, and like enough she was."

"No, no, father," sobbed the poor mother; "Dora ain't like that, now. Something's happened to her, and I shall never—never—never see my darling child no more!" and

the poor woman burst into a fresh paroxysm of tears.

Elphick sat down moodily for a few minutes, and then went back to his workshop, but he could not work long—five or ten minutes. He returned to know if there was any news, always finding some neighbour with his weeping wife, who had come, as they are all so ready to do, to weep with those that weep, and suggest every imaginable horror that could be thought to have befallen the luckless Dora.

About eleven o'clock a little boy—a stranger in the village—with a face flushed as though with hard running, asked for Mrs. Elphick's cottage; he was eagerly directed by many voices, and asked, if by chance he brought news of Mrs. Elphick's daughter.

"I dun' know. A young woman give me this and a shilling to come with it to Mrs. Elphick's."

"You're the boy from the White Hart, bean't you?"

"Yes, I be."

"Run on quick—there, that's the cottage; here, I'll go with you;" and Mrs. Briggs, eager to hear if the message brought news of Dora, hurried with the boy to Elphick's cottage.





CHAPTER XXI.

THE autumn evenings are getting short and chill, and a few people are coming back to refill the deserted London streets. The slaughter of grouse and partridge is gradually drawing to a close, and the pheasants begin to shake in their feathers as their time rapidly approaches to fall beneath the sportsman's gun. And those who have snatched a brief holiday, roaming over sweet-scented, breezy moors, or stumbling over turnips and stubble, are back again to their daily round of work

in the crowded city—of the sweet country air and the cheerful sights and sounds which have gladdened them for a few weeks, nothing remains but the pleasant memory and the fresher energy it has given them to resume their toil. Some with no sporting inclinations have domestically gone with wife and children to inhale the sea-breezes, to find amusement in a telescope, and a dip in the sea, and a saunter on the beach in sand-shoes, with a newspaper, glancing from it occasionally to watch Frank, and Janey, and Mary digging huge holes with wooden spades, and filling them up with little pails full of sea-water. They too have now exchanged this indolent happiness for the dark counting-house or the shop, and those bright hours are reckoned with the past. Amongst the number of those who had been to the sea-side, were a Mr. and Mrs.

Robinson, with their two grandchildren. They kept a small shop in the Borough. He was a framer and gilder, and had married a country girl, who, though at first delighting in the idea of a London life, soon grew weary of it, and pined for quiet and fresh air; but her lot was cast—this could not be. However, she managed, by coaxing and economy, to win her husband's consent to a trip to the sea-side every autumn; and to that brief holiday she looked forward all the year. She was no longer young now—her children had grown up and married—but still she liked her trip to the sea, and still her husband indulged her; for, to say the truth, he dearly loved a quiet life, and found the best mode of securing that was to let his wife have her own way. In their early married days, they had sometimes taken a trip to the country, instead of to the

sea, to her relations ; but since then, poor Mrs. Robinson's short temper had taken offence at some little unintentional neglect, and she had vowed she would never go down to see "sister Elphick" again. So the sea-side was now the invariable resort of Mr. and Mrs. Robinson. They had just returned from their trip, and were trying to settle down to their London life, and Mrs. Robinson was "improving the occasion," and entertaining her husband by grumbling at the noise, the smoke, the dirt, and everything she could think of which proved London to be the most odious place in the wide world, when her oration was interrupted by a knock at the private door.

"Now, who can that be, James? If it's Alfred Thomson, I won't see him ; so it's no use—now go out in the passage and stop him."

“My dear, I don’t think it is him, indeed.”

“Well, go and see, I desire you, for in this house he shall come no more.”

“I’m sure I don’t know what he’s done, my——”

“Now, don’t stop to argue, James; he’ll be in the room.” And, true enough, before James could get to the door, it opened, and the little maid-of-all-work announced a visitor, but not the one Mrs. Robinson appeared to dread, for a young woman followed the maid.

Mrs. Robinson rose and examined the newcomer gravely, who stood and smiled, but made no remark until Mrs. Robinson said—

“Why, it’s a face we ought to know, surely; there’s a homely look in it.”

“Yes,” said the visitor, quietly, advancing

a little more into the room, "a very homely look. You will not drive it away, will you? I want shelter here to-night, Aunt Louy."

"Is it an Elphick?"

"It is, aunt—Dora Elphick."

"Alone, Dora?"

"Yes, aunt, alone in London for the first time. I have found my way here, because I knew my mother's sister would not turn out into the London streets amongst strangers the little girl she used to love and pet. Would you, dear aunty?"

"Dear, dear me, certainly not—certainly not," said Mr. Robinson, glancing nervously at his wife and taking repeated pinches of snuff.

Mrs. Robinson, to her husband's surprise, walked up to her niece, and putting one hand on each shoulder, looked for a moment in her face, and then fell to kissing her and crying

and sobbing, and between her sobs saying, "Oh, your face is what your mother's was when we were happy children together!"

"Then you won't send me away?" said Dora.

"No, no, indeed!" And then she took her upstairs to take her things off, and sent out for patties for supper, and every delicacy she could think of, for the child of her whom she had not spoken to for years through a foolish misunderstanding. When they had returned to the parlour, Robinson asked his niece what business had brought her to London.

Dora grew red at this question, and answered with some hesitation.

"Why, uncle, I—I am growing tired of our quiet place. I wanted a change, and I thought I might see some new fashions, for you know I am a dressmaker in our village."

“So you shall, dear ; we’ll go out together, and look about us. It will be quite a comfort to me to have a companion. But what made you think of coming here? Your mother did not send you?”

“No, aunt ; to tell you the truth, I did not say one word to mother about coming, and she did not know I was gone out of the house until I got to Bradleigh ; then I wrote her a note to say I was going to London on business, and I should come straight to you, and if you would not have me I would return to-morrow. I left Sarah Tyler, my cousin, you know, to see to mother. She promised she would if I wanted to go away for a change any time. So I just said, ‘If so be mother sends in to you to say I’m gone away for a bit, just you pop in and see to her.’ But I left everything all right for to-day—got up

at four o'clock and put everything right, and started about half-past five."

"Ah!" said Robinson, taking a pinch of snuff. "I don't see clear what you wanted to come away for without your mother knowing it though, now."

"Why, you see, uncle, I was so bent on coming; and I knew, if I asked mother, she would not let me; so I took French leave, do you see?"

But uncle Robinson did not see, and only shook his head and took another pinch of snuff.

"*I* see, my dear; and that's enough," said her aunt. "Your poor uncle can see and understand very little beyond snuff; neither does he know poor Sarah Elphick as *I* do, and how difficult she is to manage. Had she known before you came here when you in-

tended coming, her rheumatism would have been suddenly much worse, and she could not have spared you. Ah! poor Sarah! You know, I suppose, love, the cause of the difference which has separated us so long?"

"No, dear aunt; not exactly."

"Sausages, my dear," said her aunt, gravely, —so gravely, that Dora thought she must have misunderstood the word, and asked her to repeat it.

"Sausages, my dear. The case was this —Have another pattie, and don't sniff, James, because I intend telling this dear girl the whole story. Well, love, the case was this—when we used to take our holiday, it was invariably down to your house we went. Poor Sarah is the last of us, and of course I thought it natural to go and see her when I could; and knowing that Elphick had nothing but what



he worked for, I always carried a little something with me towards the housekeeping, and frocks for you children, and such like. Well, my dear, the last time I went—do not sniff, James—the last time I went, I took with me four pounds of the beautifulest sausages you ever saw. I need not tell you, my dear, that sausages are things that will keep in cool weather, especially—It *was* quite cool weather, James—quite late in the autumn, so there was no excuse whatever for the insult. Judge my surprise when we sat down to supper on the sausages.”

“What, instead of chairs, my love?” remarked Robinson, vigorously applying another pinch of snuff to his nose.

“James, joking is not always suitable. Your niece knows what I mean,” she said, with such gravity that Dora felt compelled to

restrain, though with the greatest effort, the laughter which her uncle's remark had occasioned. "You know, my dear Dora, what I mean. Nothing was provided for our entertainment but the food we had brought ourselves. I rose from the table; I would not have swallowed a mouthful; and the next morning I left Bradleigh, never to return to it unless an apology was made, which apology I have never received."

"Oh, aunt, it is so long ago, you will forget it and forgive it, I am sure. Mother thought you liked sausages, and that they would be nicer than anything we could get in our homely way."

"Well, my dear, I felt it, I can assure you, most bitterly; and if Sarah had only written to say she was sorry, I might have looked it over, but she never has."

“ Well, you will look it over for my sake, aunt, now, I know—won’t you? I’m sure mother will be so much obliged to you for taking me in ; and it will be all right again, and next holidays you’ll come and spend with us, won’t you ?”

“ Well, I can’t make any promises about that, my dear ! It will depend greatly upon what she says as to your being here now.”

That night poor James was kept awake by a long dissertation on the merits of the case, till the constant injunction, “ Don’t sniff !” was exchanged for “ Don’t snore, James !” as sleep asserted a power superior to the attention he endeavoured to give to his wife’s harangue.

The next morning, soon after breakfast, her aunt proposed they should take a walk through the West-end of London to see the

shops. And now Dora's difficulty commenced, for she had other views than those she had stated to her aunt and uncle for coming to London, and knowing her aunt's irritable disposition, dared not refuse her companionship, much as she would have preferred going out alone. So she finally determined to go out with her aunt as she requested her then, and to take some other opportunity during the day of trying to carry out the object she had in view in her visit to London.

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